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FEBRUARY 2005

neatoday

Can All Your Kids READ?

Increasingly, educators say no. We look at some of the latest cool—and controversial—programs to boost literacy for kids of all ages.

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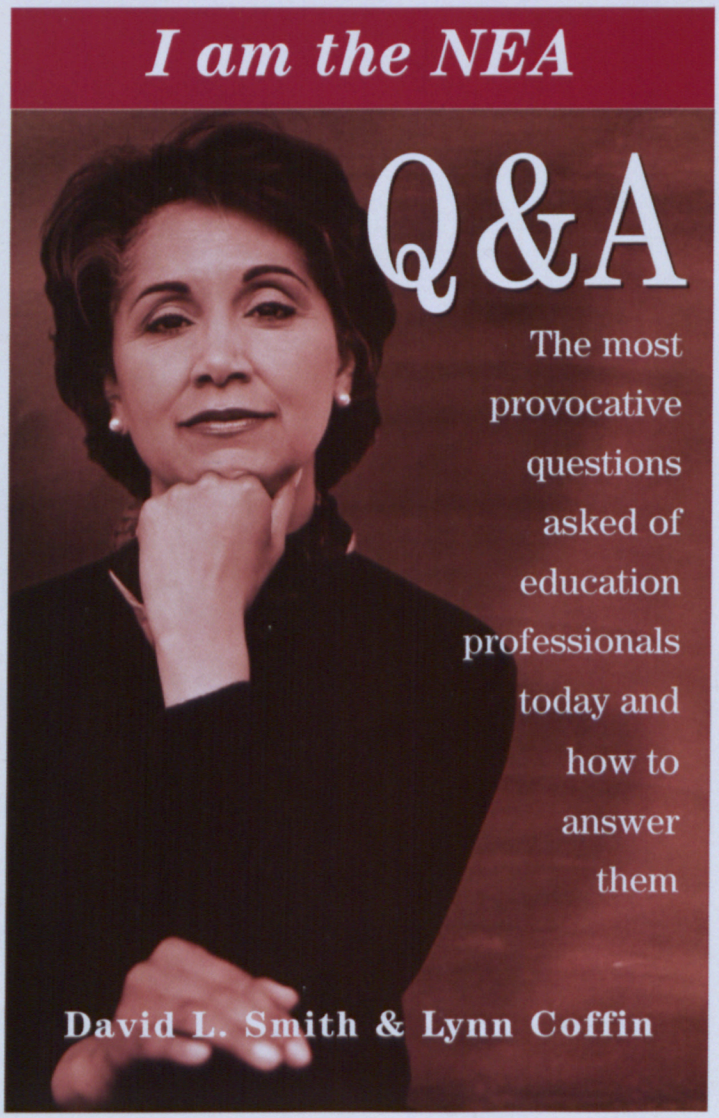
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The most provocative questions asked of education professionals today and how to answer them
David L. Smith & Lynn Coffin

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> VOLUME 23 > NUMBER 5 > 2005

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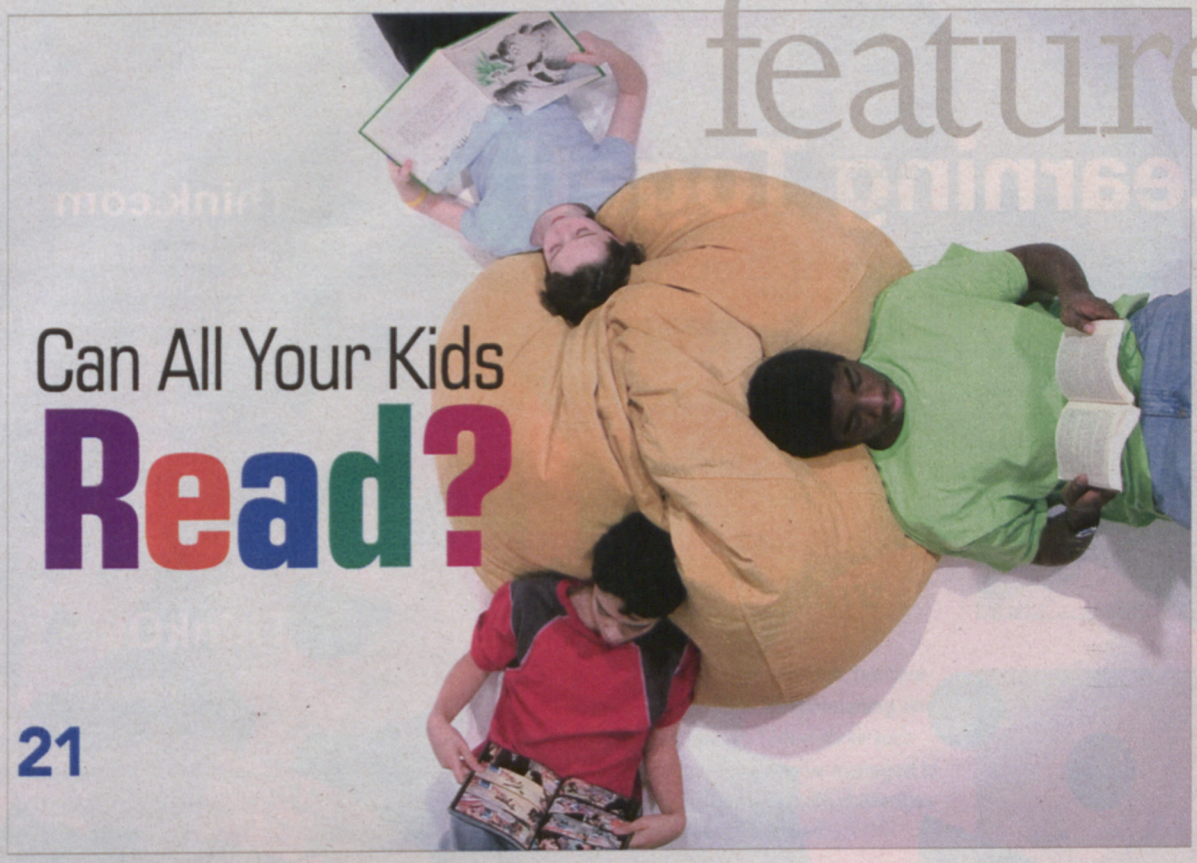


Can All Your Kids Read?

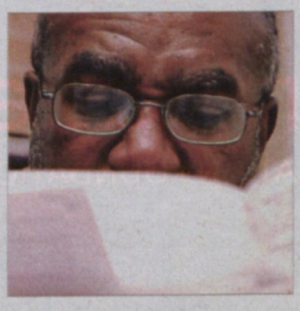
COVER 21

Helping kids understand—and love—the written word has never been the exclusive task of the elementary teacher. Yet the hubbub around instruction and motivation often stops in the early grades. Which raises the question: What do you do when Johnny, the seventh grader, isn't getting it?

BUS BEHAVIOR

'Hands Off, Heads Inside!' 32

Managing students behavior is as important on the bus as it is in the classroom. Drivers share strategies for keeping their eyes on the road and their passengers in their seats.



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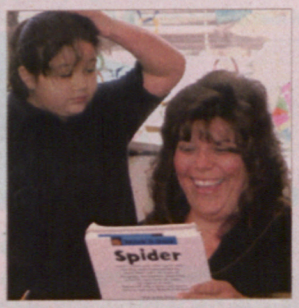

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MUSIC POWER

No *Laughing* Matter 40

Legendary folk musician and social activist Peter Yarrow uses music to teach students respect for each other and equips teachers with the tools needed to transform schools into safe, compassionate places.

PHOTO TOP: DANNY PECK; BOTTOM, CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER RIGHT: JEFF GEISSLER, OPERATION RESPECT, GREGG PEARSON, JIM STARR

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Mississippi educators, led by the Mississippi Education Association, fight for adequate resources for public schools, training a 90,000-strong cadre of citizens armed with letter-writing and lobbying skills and the will to demand funding from legislators.

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Fourth-grade social studies teacher Matthew Wilson catches and releases rattlesnakes to collect wildlife data; library media specialist Phyllis Hall brings books to impoverished areas of South America.

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Not so long ago, elementary teachers in California had to be proficient at playing the autoharp and teaching music. A retired educator reflects on the joy of injecting music into daily classroom life.

PHOTO LEFT: JAN UNDERWOOD; SMALL PHOTOS FROM TOP: BILL JOHNSON, JOHN REIS, ANDRÉ KUDYUSOV/PHOTOMONDO, JOE LIUZZO, BRIAN DAVIES
COVER PHOTO: DANNY PECK

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Hearts to You

Growing up, I spent many an after-school hour living and watching life in Louisiana's public schools. My mom and dad were high school teachers—each for more than 30 years—and every day at 3 when my elementary school let out, I'd skip to their school a block away, then bounce between classrooms, taking bets on who'd strike out for home first. ¶ Alas, it was always a wait. ¶ Mom was usually organizing her room or readying her Candy Stripers for another volunteer afternoon at Veteran's Hospital. Dad was invariably teaching students how to lay out the school newspaper—on linotype machines!—or helping develop pictures they'd taken with old Rolleiflex cameras. ¶ And they weren't the only busy bees; all around were teachers doing the extra stuff that kept the school buzzing long past the last bell had rung. ¶ It wasn't until years later that I came to appreciate that all that work was, plain and simple, about love—for the profession, for the students, and for their self-respect as African-Americans hailing from a segregated South. ¶ These days, I'm reminded—over and again through you—of the abiding love it still takes to make schools respectable havens for learning. Places kids want to be. It also takes courage—and if you need some convincing, look no further than our feature, "You Gotta Have Heart" (page 48). There we profile three educators who not only love their profession, but embrace it with remarkable spirit, despite illnesses and disabilities that might have made others pack up and go home. ¶ Throughout this issue, in fact, we turn a spotlight on educators who every day show their love for students and public schools—from paraeducator Barbara Salazar, who keeps the train running in the special ed class she assists (page 36), to the many teachers and librarians who work feverishly to spark student interest in that waning American pastime, reading (page 21). ¶ For them, and for you, we open our hearts and say thanks. May February bring you a bounty of Valentines and many sweet stories of success. Just don't forget to share them with us (page 11). We're standing by.

Marilyn Milloy

EDITOR MARILYN MILLOY

neatoday

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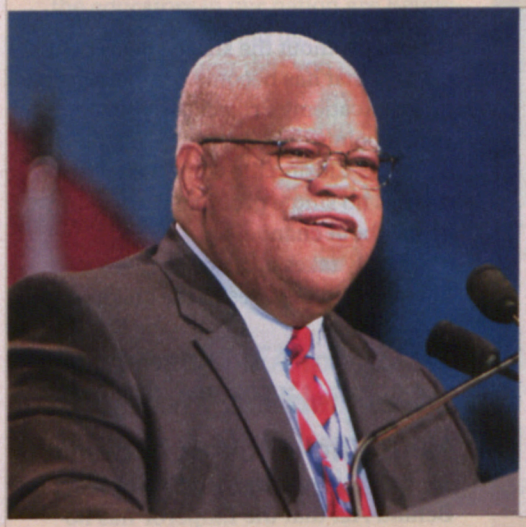
Great Public Schools for Every Child

Showing Them the Love—and Money

This February, NEA hopes to make a little Black history of our own—as well as deliver a valentine, of sorts, to future public school teachers.



"Qualified minority teachers serve as excellent role models and 'culture go-betweens' for an increasingly diverse student population."

—REG WEAVER

We conceived of this idea as a way to help close the achievement gaps that currently exist in our education system. Undoubtedly, you've seen these gaps in your own classrooms: the kids from underdeveloped countries who can't read nearly as well as their white classmates. The African-American boys from your kindergarten who wind up being sent to special education classes and never make it to AP history—or college. The science scores of your 11th-grade girls that are consistently lower than the boys'.

However, another achievement gap exists that's almost invisible to our eyes: the gap between teaching candidates themselves. According to the Educational Testing Service, only 59 percent of Hispanic and 69 percent of African-American teaching candidates are currently passing their certification exams—as compared with 91 percent of the whites. What this means, of course, is that at a time when the number of minority students is skyrocketing, the number of minority teachers—which is already at an all-time low—will continue to drop even further.

We all know that training and experience create a quality teacher—not skin color. However, while race doesn't determine anyone's ability to master and teach a subject, research does show that teachers of color have higher performance expectations for minority kids, which, in turn, can impact student achievement. What's more, qualified minority teachers also serve as excellent role models and "culture go-betweens" for an increasingly diverse student population.

A few years ago, a white teacher who was just starting out told me there was no one to whom she could turn to help her relate to her minority students. You see, quality minority teachers are not just an asset to their students, but to their white colleagues as well.

Therefore, if we're really serious about closing the achievement gap and providing a great public school for every child, we've got to be serious about teacher quality *and* teacher diversity, too. Bridging the licensure gap among minority teachers is an essential part of bridging all the other gaps.

The late Hon. Shirley Chisholm once said (and she knew a thing or two about education herself, having obtained a master's degree in elementary education before serving in Congress), "Rhetoric never won a revolution yet." If we are going to truly change our schools for the better, we've got to produce more than rhetoric.

Which is why, as Valentine's Day approaches, my heart swells to tell you that NEA is not just "talking the talk" but "walking the walk"—with Tom Joyner, no less.

Joyner, a nationally syndicated radio personality and philanthropist, is partnering with NEA by providing $700,000 in financial aid, in addition to NEA's professional development expertise, to aid unlicensed teachers in completing their certification requirements. These scholarships will enable qualified education students—as well as unlicensed teachers already working in public schools with large minority student populations—to participate in programs at seven Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to prepare them for licensing exams.

It's a matter of helping future teachers to better help themselves—and their future students. NEA has lent its expertise and will assess applications and refer qualified applicants to the certification program at the closest participating HBCU. In exchange, these scholarship winners must commit to teach at least *three* years in public schools with a significant number of minority students. It's a win-win situation: teaching candidates working in underserved areas get the training they need—and children and schools get the quality educators they deserve. For me, it's a true expression of love.

Reg Weaver

NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

PHOTO: NICK CRETTIER

A day in the life of a cafeteria pro p34
neatoday
Closing The Gap
Bridging the academic divide is no easy work, but NEA members are finding that a little innovation—
of will—can go a long way.

WONDERFUL!

Thank you for the wonderful January cover story dedicated to closing achievement gaps. I appreciate that achievement gaps are taking center stage in discussions about great public schools for every child. The wonderful writing in your January issue will feed this conversation here in Utah and prove an invaluable resource in further collaborations around this important cause.

I was lucky enough to attend the NAACP/NEA-sponsored *Brown v. Board of Education* commemorative summit, held March 2004 in Washington, D.C. There, a colleague and I listened to discussions of national achievement gaps and felt compelled to bring these messages back to our state. We sponsored a similar summit in October at our state Association convention.

Teachers, professors, and community activists gathered to examine issues of the achievement gap on the state level and what local and state associations might do to be proactive. These conversations showed how the community at large might take an active role in advocating for issues related to equity and social justice.

The assembled group was a mixed one with diverse demographics. Their commitment to making schools work for all students continues to inspire me.

JIM MARTIN
Salt Lake City, Utah

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

We in the Academy Project at Lincoln Annex (spotlighted in "Closing the Gap," January) are indeed committed to helping all students achieve through parental involvement, but small class size and quality professional development are also important components of our approach. Moreover, New Jersey is well ahead of the curve in mandating early childhood education.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the shared decision making that has become the hallmark of the Academy Project. As your article points out, there is no magic bullet in "Closing the Gap." Likewise, there is no single group that alone can bring about change.

It truly takes a village to make a difference in the lives of the children in our care.

SUSANNE CLARK
Spotswood, New Jersey

PUNISHING 'POOR' SCHOOLS

It's time to say of the No Child Left Behind Act that the Emperor has no clothes. NCLB has continued to punish those in "poor" schools and label them as "failing." Furthermore, the program was underfunded and overloaded with impossible requirements.

We know that good schools come from small class sizes, involved parents and communities, committed teachers, an enlightened administration, and adequate funding. One cannot continue to punish schools that are struggling without these factors.

JILL GRUBB
Marengo, Ohio

'REAL' PEOPLE PAY VISIT

Thank you for your coverage of the Utah Education Association's road trip! ("Stop, Look, and Listen," January.) I was lucky enough to be at Hillcrest Junior High when President Pat Rusk and the gang came by, and it was so nice for everyone to see that UEA is made up of real people!

Teachers enjoyed the opportunity of mingling with the people who are out there working for us every day.

JUDY MAHOSKEY
Murray, Utah

NEA REPUBLICANS

As a veteran teacher and a Republican, I'm happy to finally be recognized within my own professional association for the very first time. ("What Now?" January). But to ask Republican NEA members to change our party from within is pompous, to say the least.

If we wanted to be Democrats, we could. We don't.

I suggest that in the future you respectfully consider that one-third of the educators in our nation are Republicans. Stop ignoring us.

I also suggest that you promote diversity within NEA by inviting Republicans into leadership positions. It's astonishing that tolerance for diversity is not practiced within NEA itself.

LISA DISBROW
Richmond, California

> **"Too many NEA members neither understand nor appreciate the 'defined-benefit' retirement plan and the future benefits they own. It will be there for retirement and it's guaranteed."** —JOHN JENSEN

PROTECT OUR PENSIONS

Thank you for the January article, "Pensions 101." Too many NEA members neither understand nor appreciate the "defined-benefit" retirement plan and the future benefits they own.

NEA members are already part of what President Bush calls the "ownership society." They've earned and own the benefit in their defined-benefit retirement plans. It will be there for retirement and it's guaranteed.

Those with defined-benefit plans can calculate their benefits, while Americans with a 401 (k) "defined-contribution" retirement plan have a difficult time figuring out how to afford to retire at any time.

JOHN JENSEN
Omaha, Nebraska

I found "Pensions 101" interesting, but was surprised to not see any reference to legislative changes in Oregon's pension system, from a traditional plan to a 401 (k)-style plan.

One projection I read for a mid-career teacher like myself showed I would receive about one-third less in retirement under the new plan. Information on this situation would have helped emphasize the importance of teacher vigilance in monitoring pension "reform" efforts in each state.

DAVID SCHMITZ
Oregon City, Oregon

PAPER, PENCILS, AND PARAS

"Qualified in Wisconsin" (Upfront, January) explains that paraeducators in the Wausau district met No Child Left Behind standards by having three classroom observations and creating a simple portfolio. I've advocated this idea because NCLB says that districts can create their own requirements.

But my district is asleep and snoring. Now I am going to approach our superiors one more time and show them this article.

I am one para fighting for those who can't take a paper and pencil test, yet are dynamite at the job they do.

TERRI PROUGH
LaPlace, Louisiana

MONTHLY ENERGIZER

The NEA magazine is the wonderful vitamin B-12 energizer that comes in the mail each month. After I read it, I pass it on to former students who are practice teaching.

FRAN RANDLE
Memphis, Tennessee

LET'S TALK

Share your ideas, comments, and opinions with *NEA Today* in one of four ways:

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IS THE WAY YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A JOB OLD SCHOOL?

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upfront

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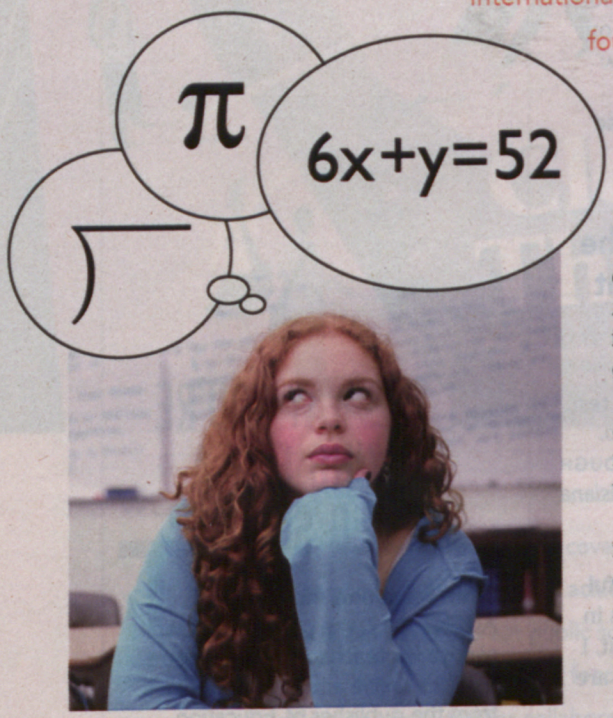
Doing the Math

Here's the bright news: A study released in December finds that compared with their international peers, American elementary and middle school students are faring pretty well in math and science, thank you. According to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or TIMSS, American fourth and eighth graders scored well above the international average.



THE DISCOURAGING NEWS comes from another study, which shows the math lights dimming once U.S. kids enter high school. This study, also released in December, found American 15-year-olds scored below average among students from developed countries. Known as the Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, this survey was sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a group of the world's richest countries.

So what's the difference between the two surveys? One is the age of the students. Another is that PISA tested the application of math ideas to daily living situations, while TIMSS is more about whether students are learning the curriculum.

Each study was conducted in 2003. The TIMSS results showed no change for fourth graders since an earlier study in 1995, but the gap between Black and white students narrowed. Eighth graders scored higher overall than in 1995 and the gap between Black and white also narrowed.

Time Out?

Is there such a thing as being with your students too much?

AMERICAN TEACHERS work more hours with their students than do teachers in any other developed country. That would be 1,139 hours a year in elementary schools and a few hours less in secondary, according to a recent survey. The average number of student contact hours in the survey was 803 in elementary, less in secondary.

Japan, notably, was at the bottom with 617 hours in elementary, 513 in "lower secondary," and 449 in "upper secondary." Japanese teachers get to spend lots of time outside their classes working together to develop and improve their lessons—which may have something to do with why Japanese students consistently score at or near the top in international competitions.

PHOTO TOP: TANYA CONSTANTINE; PHOTO BOTTOM: COMSTOCK

(Too Much) Love Abounding

Is your school a jungle of flowers and balloons on Valentine's Day? Do you see more teddy bears than students? When it comes to celebrating Valentine's Day in schools, love isn't always so sweet.

THE HOLIDAY may be full of fun for students, but, according to *USA Today*, some teachers and administrators think Valentine's Day has gotten out of control in schools and are trying to limit Valentine's gifts during school hours. Some teachers point to how distracted students get with all those sweets and gifts coming in—and how embarrassed students who don't receive anything feel. Plus, some school offices have become more like loading docks for balloons and flowers, which somebody (and we aren't calling names) has to distribute.

The chaos has led some administrators to politely ask students to send their little gifts of affection somewhere else besides school. A number of Greenville County high schools in South Carolina have outright banned Valentine's Day deliveries.

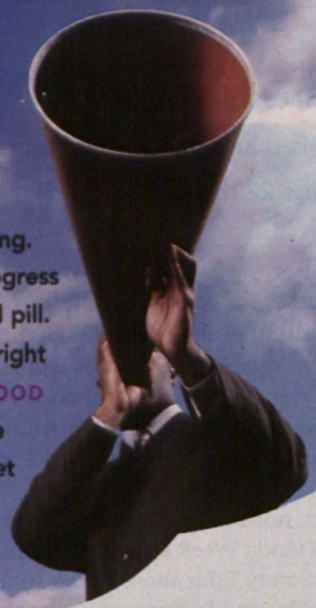
Some educators, though, think that Valentine's Day at school is all in good fun. David Sawhill, a math teacher at Pioneer Junior High in California, says teachers "could actually use the deliveries as a teaching tool."

After all, he notes, they allow "students to express themselves toward others." Hmm. Sawhill, whose school allows deliveries, does add that an organized delivery system could help keep some of the Valentine chaos under control.

Let's Hear It for...

...GOOD NEWS!

Okay, so you're bummed out about all that testing. District officials are at your door with their progress check pads. Your kids are needing a serious chill pill. Take a deep breath. Surely something's going right this year—and we want to know! **TELL US YOUR GOOD NEWS TALE** in 200 words or less, and we'll select the best of the best for a future *NEA Today* issue. But get to it—you have until **FEBRUARY 20** to send your story to neatoday-reply@list.nea.org.



Notepad

Take the Break

With the first semester of school just about behind you, you're probably wincing at the amount of money you've already spent outfitting your classroom with supplies.

Fortunately, you'll be able to claim at least part of those expenses on your taxes this year and next. Congress has extended a plan that allows educators—both teachers and support professionals—to deduct up to $250 of their out-of-pocket classroom expenses on their 2004 and 2005 taxes.

Congress originally passed the legislation in 2002, but it expired at the end of 2003.

NEA worked with lawmakers on the two-year extension and continues to fight to make the deduction permanent and expand it to include professional development expenses.

The tax bill also extends a federal tax credit bond program that provides funding for school construction and extends a tax deduction for corporations that donate computers to public schools.

Read next month's *NEA Today* to see how much some of your colleagues spend on their classrooms and what they buy.

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PHOTO TOP: COMSTOCK; PHOTO BOTTOM: STOCKBYTE

TV Teacher

He may be a TV producer and photojournalist, but, for all practical purposes, Omaha, Nebraska's Ben Gray is an educator. And he's using his journalistic expertise to help adults and kids understand important lessons about African-American history—not just during the month of February, but throughout the year.

GRAY'S GROUNDBREAKING work in the community and with students last year earned him the Carter G. Woodson Memorial Award from NEA and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. But he's had little time to stop and muse about that too much.

Gray works for television station KETV in Omaha, where he produces *Kaleidoscope*, a show focusing on the Black community. The program addresses controversial issues, such as the growing influence of Islam in the penitentiary, and features celebrities and politicians. Gray also chairs the Omaha Public Schools' African American Achievement Council, gives talks in schools, and produces a book club show that allows students to tackle touchy subjects, such as intraracial discrimination against African Americans with darker skin.

Gray says while February's Black History Month celebrations are important, African-American history "ought to be infused in curriculum" instead of being largely marginalized or ignored, and adds that positive African-American images "enrich and motivate Black children and engender respect from other ethnic groups." Encouraging respect is important because, as Gray reminds in one of his television programs, "We can choose to live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools."

—SARAH RABOVSKY

See more on Ben Gray's work via streaming video at www.nea.org/neatodayextra.

WWW.NEA.ORG/NEATODAYEXTRA

Hygienic Heroes

Hearing the familiar song of cough, cough, sneeze, snort? You're not alone. Cold and flu season has arrived and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say kids miss 22 million school days every year because of the common cold.

BUT INSTEAD of stocking up on chicken soup, you may want to reach for the antibacterial soap and team up with Ship-Shape and his Scrub Club to fend off those pesky viruses. With some guidance from this legion of germ fighters, children can stay healthy by learning the dos and don'ts of hand washing at www.scrubclub.org, an interactive Web site that features seven "soaper-hero" kids in a "webisode," games, songs, and activities, as well as helpful advice for teachers and parents for keeping kids germ-free.

NSF International, an independent, not-for-profit organization devoted to public health, launched the site in September as part of National Clean Hands Week and National Food Safety Education Month. The organization, along with The Partnership for Food Safety Education, hopes that by getting kids to wash their hands properly, the Scrub Club will help kids stay healthy and increase the number of days children spend learning in class instead of coughing and sneezing at home.

—S.R.

PHOTO TOP: RYAN MCVAY (TV) AND SEWELL JOHNSON (BEN GRAY); PHOTO BOTTOM: ANDREW BRET WALLIS

Insanity of the Month

Mixed Messages

ONCE AGAIN, large numbers of public schools have received failing marks for their performance on the federal No Child Left Behind law, while simultaneously scoring at the top of the pack on their own state accountability systems. It's a bit like getting an "F" and an "A" for math at the same time. In Florida, for example, 1,262 schools got the coveted "A" from the state—and 827 of them didn't make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) under the federal statute. In North Carolina, 102 schools rated "excellent" by the state didn't make AYP. In California, 403 achieved double the state growth target but failed AYP. And on and on.

HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE? Because there are so many ways—literally dozens—to fail in the federal system. Not only must the student body pass standardized reading and math tests, but each of many subgroups of students—ethnic groups, low-income students, special education students—must also pass, and 95 percent of each group must take the test. Highly useful information comes from looking at the scores for each of those groups, but flunking a school because of one slip-up is—well, insanity. That's why a large and growing coalition of groups that work to improve public education are joining NEA in pushing for reform. For more, see **WWW.NEA.ORG/NEATODAYEXTRA.**

NCLB: Test Yourself

YOU LIVE IT EVERY DAY, but how much do you *really* know about the so-called No Child Left Behind law? Find out by taking a test developed by NEA member Stan Karp for *Rethinking Schools* magazine. It's fun, it's enlightening, and you won't see your score published in your local newspaper. If you send in your results, *Rethinking Schools* promises that "we will send you a list of the slots in society for which you seem qualified."

Visit www.rethinkingschools.org and go to the archives. The test is in the fall 2004 issue.

Global Takes

Hunger rises again

At least 5 million children die of hunger every year, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported in December. That comes to one every six seconds.

The total number of people who are hungry grew to over 850 million, or more than one in seven. FAO found that the number of hungry people fell during the 1990s, but now it is rising again. Many countries have reduced the number of hungry people, however. More than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America reduced hunger by at least 25 percent. Hunger was down slightly in Subsaharan Africa as a whole, FAO reported.

Can Thais Lift IQ?

The government of Thailand has announced a drive to boost children's IQs by 25 percent over the next decade.

The program will start before birth, teaching pregnant women how to help their children develop high IQ. Curricula will also be revised.

Thailand's prime minister wants children to start learning a foreign language before age 6.

He said the government will give financial aid to poor students so they can finish secondary school and go on to a university.

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PHOTO TOP: NATHAN HAM; PHOTO BOTTOM: COMSTOCK

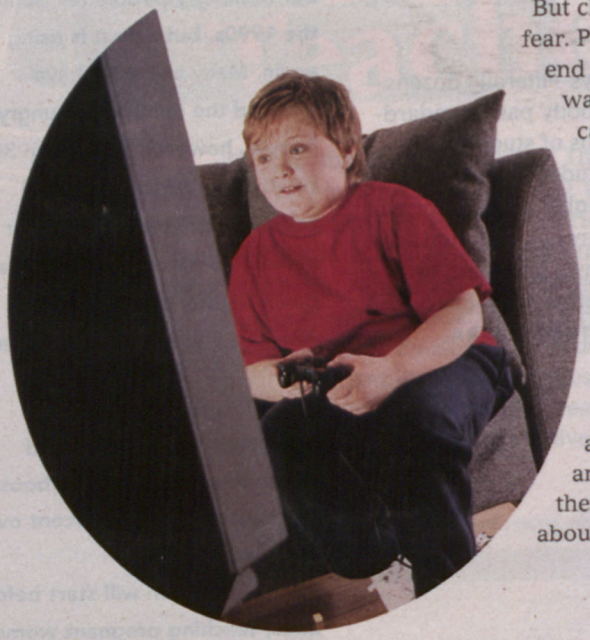
Safer But Plumper

Were the "good old days" really that good? Not necessarily, according to Kenneth Land, a sociologist at Duke University, who analyzed seven quality-of-life indicators from 1975 to 2002. He found mixed results.

YES, MORE CHILDREN live in single-parent homes, and teen suicides are up. But children are safer than they were three decades ago. Student achievement has remained fairly steady.

Meanwhile, the teen birth rate has dropped from 18.7 births per 1,000 to 11.9. Teenagers are having less sex these days, and when they do, they're more likely to use contraception.

But children have gotten chubbier—partly, Land believes, because of fear. Parents want to keep their children safe, he says, so some kids end up in after-school activities. But too many others stay home, watching television, playing video games, and consuming extra calories they don't burn.



Too many children stay home, watching television, playing video games, and consuming extra calories they don't burn.

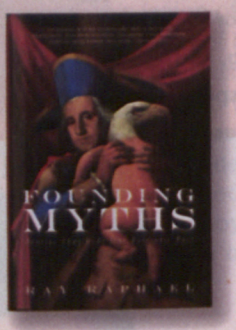
That's something Arkansas parents are hearing about. Under a 2003 law, Arkansas schools measured students' height and weight, discovering that 22 percent are clearly overweight, and another 18 percent are close to it. Parents got the news on their children's report cards, along with advice on what to do about it.

BOOK FOCUS

America's Founding Myths

Was Patrick Henry really the one to say "Give me liberty or give me death?" Did Paul Revere even take that famous Midnight Ride? Was Molly Pitcher actually a real person?

The answers to these questions may come as a surprise. Ray Raphael uncovers the historic errors that have been advanced by our nation's treasured stories surrounding the American Revolution and the birth of our nation in *Founding Myths: Stories that Hide our Patriotic Past* (The New Press, 2004). The stories you have heard of our nation's founding aren't necessarily the truth.



In fact, the real founding heroes may not be who you think. Raphael reveals that true stories of our nation's beginnings tell not of the heroism of a few, but of the patriotism of the many.

He points out that the founding of the United States depended on an impassioned network of anonymous activists who were committed to freedom. It was these dedicated and determined people who are the real heroes.

—SARAH RABOVSKY

PHOTO TOP: DIGITAL VISION

Lights, Camera, Teach!

First 5 Years

Teachers at Roosevelt Elementary School in Long Beach, California, have grown accustomed to being videotaped at work. It's not some kind of Big Brother spy operation, though. They're doing it to themselves, to help new teachers improve their practice.

THE TAPING BEGAN in 2001, and its success brought teachers Joan Kennedy (right) and Patty Nagano (left), who coordinate the program, the NEA Foundation's 2004 Hilda Maehling Award for innovative professional development activities.

New teachers in the program review their tapes with their more experienced teaching coaches. Bad hair days, though, can be a distraction on video, and one teacher adds that she was watching her weight more closely than her teaching. So the teachers decided to point the camera only at students. Another safeguard: A teacher can watch the tape first and decide whether to show it to the coach. "Initially everyone was apprehensive," says Kennedy. "But it turned out not to be an administrative gotcha." Administrators are taped, too, and the principal was first in line.

Kennedy and Nagano say the program has built a collaborative support system at the school, which has helped boost teacher retention to 90 percent. They say it has helped experienced teachers as well as newcomers teach better.

Smile

Yikes! Not me!

WHILE GRADING ESSAYS for my 10th-grade class one evening, I came across a student's paper that was fairly well-written. This student was not doing well in class, and because there was such improvement, I wanted to tell her how proud I was of her achievement. I wrote on the paper in large red letters, "SEE ME."

After I handed the papers back and the bell rang, she tapped me on the shoulder, held up the paper, and said, "Mr. P., I can't see you, I'm seeing four other guys!"

At that point I didn't know what to say and just squeaked out, "Good job."

—ALAN PRESSMAN
Montville, New Jersey

Two-Minute Tips

Organizing Student Information

To keep my homeroom organized, I keep a three-ring binder with a plastic report cover pocket sleeve for each student. Each sleeve contains a contact card with home information, address, phone numbers, allergies, etc. This way I always have each child's information at my fingertips. I also use the pockets to store notes I send home, conference confirmations, and notes on discipline for each child. At conference time, I have all the information I need on a student readily available.

—MARTHA BAUGHMAN
South Carolina

Border Bonanza

After 14 plus years of teaching and buying nearly all of the decorative borders available, not to mention going broke in the process, I came up with an alternative to expensive borders: I go to discount stores and buy their cheap rolls of decorative or theme wrapping paper. I buy several different patterns and laminate the paper.

Then I cut the paper to the desired widths and/or lengths to border my bulletin boards. The borders last a long time.

—MYRNA SPEAR
Rialto, California

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PHOTO TOP: SANDY SCHAEFFER; ILLUSTRATION: PAUL GILLIGAN

To generate donations for scholarships that send needy kids to college, Bill Jones relies on his ability to motivate others. To raise thousands of dollars for his church, he calls on his talent at being persuasive. And to get dozens of people to help him organize community programs, he taps into his management skills. With all he does, it's hard to believe Bill Jones is actually retired. Sure, he could have taken a break and relaxed. But Bill Jones learned something even more valuable in the U.S. Marine Corps. He learned that giving back is better than sitting back.

UNSELFISHNESS

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Clearing a Path for Teacher Diversity

A Nevada affiliate makes strides with novel recruitment effort, while NEA and the Tom Joyner Foundation start scholarship program.

Like a lot of school districts across America, Clark County in Nevada has plenty of students of color—and not many teachers who look like them. But unlike in many other places, NEA leaders there have a plan to fix the disparity.

And they're not looking far.

Prospective teachers already can be found in local classrooms: More than half of students in Clark County are non-white—and a partnership between the Clark County Education Association Community Foundation, Nevada State College, and the school district hopes to tap the most highly motivated among them to become tomorrow's educators.

The Student to Teacher Enlistment Project, or STEP, is offering free college credit classes this year to 150 high school juniors who want to become educators. The students take courses at the high schools so they can remain with their peers and participate in high school activities. But by the time they receive their high school diplomas, these selected students will have completed about a third of their college coursework and can transfer to Nevada State College, where they'll continue to have their tuition and books paid for by the Foundation.

The only hitch: they have to commit to return to Clark County classrooms as teachers once they graduate.

It's this kind of innovative program, says NEA President Reg Weaver, that is critical to getting more minority teachers in the pipeline. For years, Weaver has been promoting the message that the teaching force must be not only well-prepared but also ethnically diverse. And for good reason.

Today nearly 40 percent of national public school children are minorities, but just 11 percent of the teachers are. Indeed, more than a third of America's public schools have no person of color on staff at all.

It's a trend Weaver is hoping can be reversed with model programs such as Nevada's—as well as through a new joint program of NEA and the Tom Joyner Foundation, whose chair is nationally syndicated radio personality and philanthropist Tom Joyner. The latter partnership, announced last month, is aimed at keeping more minority teachers in the classroom by helping them boost their qualifications and complete their teacher certification (see "New Help for Minority Teachers").

"With public schools redoubling their commitment to closing achievement gaps and ensuring that all teachers are highly qualified," Weaver notes, "recruiting and retaining more teachers of color can be crucial to our success in these areas."

That notion was affirmed in a recent report by the National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, a group of education organizations of which NEA is a part. In the report the Collaborative analyzed the relationships among educational opportunity, educational achievement, teacher diversity, and teacher quality. It found that teachers of color have higher performance expectations for minority kids and that students of color tend to perform better—academically, personally, and socially—when taught by teachers from their own ethnic groups.

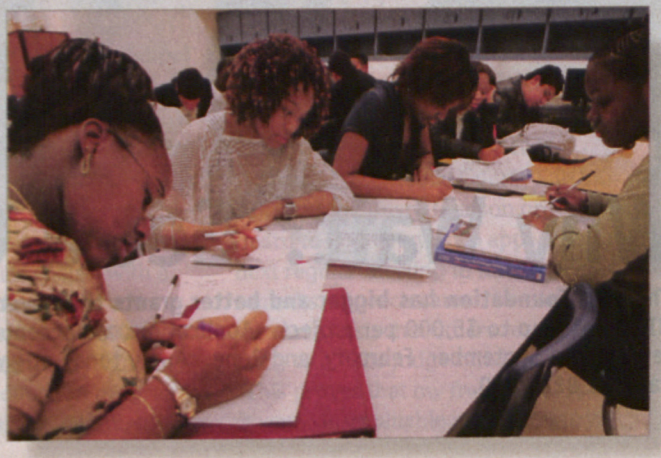
NEA and its partners in the Collaborative say they are making it a priority to increase the recruitment and retention of teachers of diverse backgrounds. But Weaver notes it will also require states and school districts developing more programs that support teachers of color both in the pipeline and in the classroom. Which is why the Nevada program, he says, is such a groundbreaking model.

Because the scholarships begin in high school, leaders there believe the program will likely attract students who might never have considered college as an option. Already some 90 percent of the students in this first STEP class are first-generation college students, reports John Jasonek, executive director of the Clark County Education Association Community Foundation. "Clearly, we're breaking cycles here."

—NANCY KOCHUK

New Help for Minority Teachers

The NEA and Tom Joyner Foundation have started a $700,000 scholarship program aimed at qualified school of education students and unlicensed teachers working in urban, suburban, and rural public schools with high percentages of minority students. The program will enable these teachers and students to prepare for licensing examinations at seven Historically Black Colleges and Universities. For more on the program and how to qualify, go to www.nea.org.



Above: NEA President **Reg Weaver** encourages the next generation of educators. Right: Juniors at Desert Pines high school in Las Vegas take part in an innovative teacher recruitment program.

PHOTO LEFT: DAYMON J. HARTLEY; RIGHT: JOHN GURZINSKI

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Strike Three for Vouchers

FLORIDA In an 8-5-1 decision, the First District Court of Appeal ruled that a 1999 voucher law, allowing students from struggling public schools to attend private or religious schools with taxpayer money, violates the state constitution. This is the third court defeat for the so-called "A+" voucher program. It's now up to the state Supreme Court to decide if it will review this case—launched by the **Florida Education Association** and other pro-public education groups.

School Funding Suit Pays Off

MONTANA The Montana Supreme Court ruled that the state's education finance system is not based on "educationally relevant factors" and fails to "adequately fund" Montana's public schools. And, to ice the cake, the court has found the state in violation of its constitution for showing "no commitment in its education goals to the preservation of Indian cultural identity." The court-ordered deadline to fix this mess: October 1. The lawsuit leading to this decision was filed by the Montana Quality Education Coalition, which includes **MEA-MFT.**

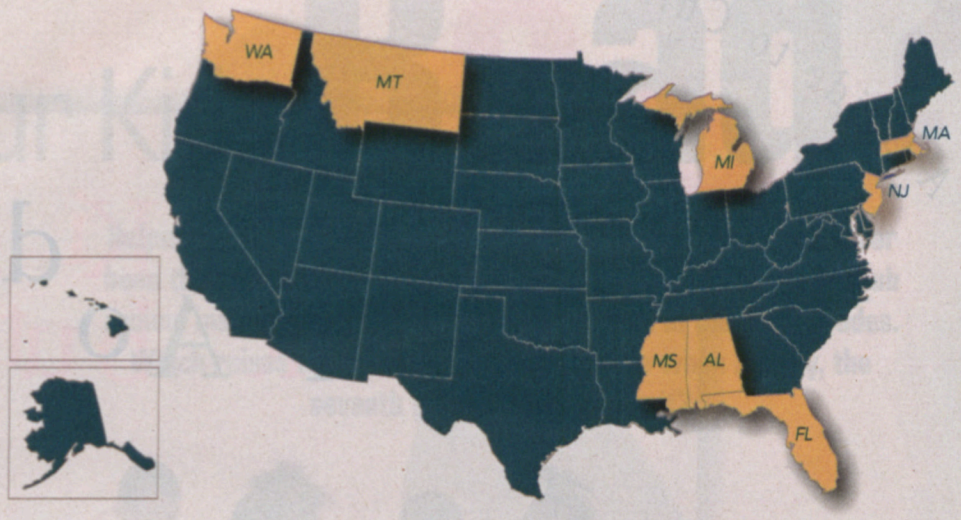
A Knockout in Atlantic City

NEW JERSEY For several months last year, state Education Commissioner William L. Librera blocked a union contract ratified by 700 teachers in the state-monitored Irvington school district. A big mistake. **Irvington Education Association (IEA)** members, backed by legal pressure from the **New Jersey Education Association,** wrote to legislators, picketed state Department of Education offices in three cities, and finally confronted Librera at the NJEA convention in Atlantic City on November 4.

That faceoff broke the deadlock. On November 15, Librera announced release of funds to pay for the Irvington contract. Says IEA President Madeline Edwards, "We were united all the way, and winning was the only acceptable outcome."

Big District Breaks the Law

MASSACHUSETTS In the state's second-largest city, the Massachusetts Labor Relations Commission (MLRC) found "probable cause" for prohibited labor practices complaints filed by the **Springfield Education Association (SEA)** against the school committee. The MLRC has scheduled formal hearings in February on the complaints, which charge Springfield negotiators with "regressive" bad-faith bargaining, unilateral imposition of health care contract provisions, and refusal to vote on a tentative agreement with SEA.



A State Without Settlements

MICHIGAN In December, the **Michigan Education Association** reported that 124 of its teacher and education support professional (ESP) bargaining units were without new contracts for more than a year. Heading the list: teacher and ESP members of the **Lakewood Education Association (LEA),** who have been battling for a new agreement since June 2003. The school board has rejected LEA proposals that would save the district money in tough fiscal times.

The Lakewood board's own proposal: close elementary schools while granting the superintendent a 3 percent raise in each of three years.

Sunnier News from the South

MISSISSIPPI Members of the **Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE)** made their presence felt in the 2004 legislative session through phone calls, e-mails, letters, and visits to lawmakers. Their hard work won an 8 percent raise for teachers and assistant teachers and full funding for health insurance costs—with a $30 million increase. And MAE will keep up the momentum in the 2005 session, lobbying for everything from full funding of the state education program to due process for teacher assistants.

Union is Legal on Campus

WASHINGTON Professors at Eastern Washington University (EWU) have become the second faculty group in the state to formally unionize under a higher education bargaining law passed in 2002. By a margin of 338–46, the EWU faculty voted in November to let the **United Faculty of Eastern (UFE)** continue to represent them in bargaining. Previous contracts were "voluntary" agreements between UFE and campus administrators; now UFE is the official, legal representative for Eastern faculty. UFE is affiliated with both NEA and the American Federation of Teachers.

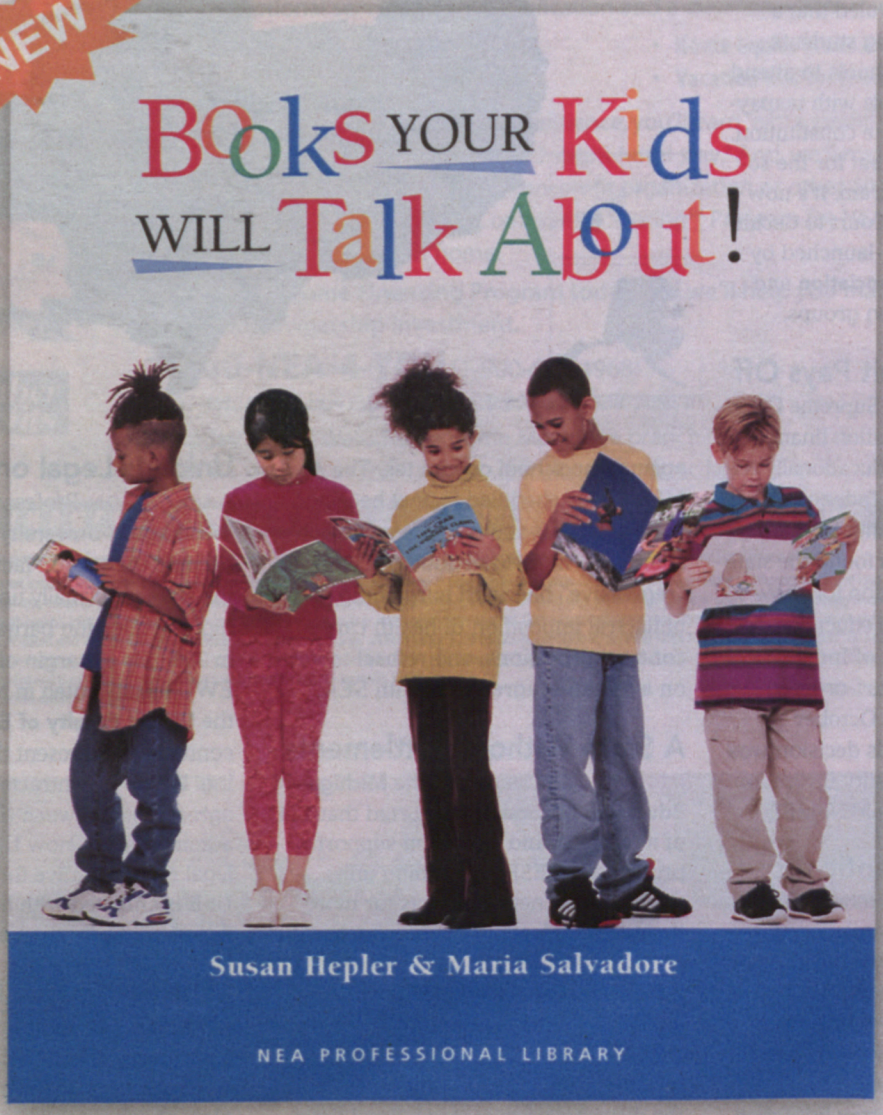
Shut Up and Sit Down

ALABAMA Last autumn, Cindy Naylor and other teachers visited a Mobile County school board meeting to complain about excessive paperwork and student testing. The teacher applause during Naylor's remarks to the board so angered board President Lonnie Parsons that he ordered Naylor to stop talking and sit down. He then called a special meeting for the next morning—when teachers would be in class.

Helped by the **Alabama Education Association,** Naylor sued the board, charging it with violating her free speech rights. Mobile County Circuit Court Judge Rusty Johnson ordered the board to allow Naylor to appear at its next regular meeting to finish her remarks. "Speech cannot be curtailed on the mere basis that others react positively to it," the judge ruled. Says Naylor, "This proves that my freedom of speech is very, very valuable in this country."

A Guide to Children's Literature for Teachers and Parents (K-6)

NEW



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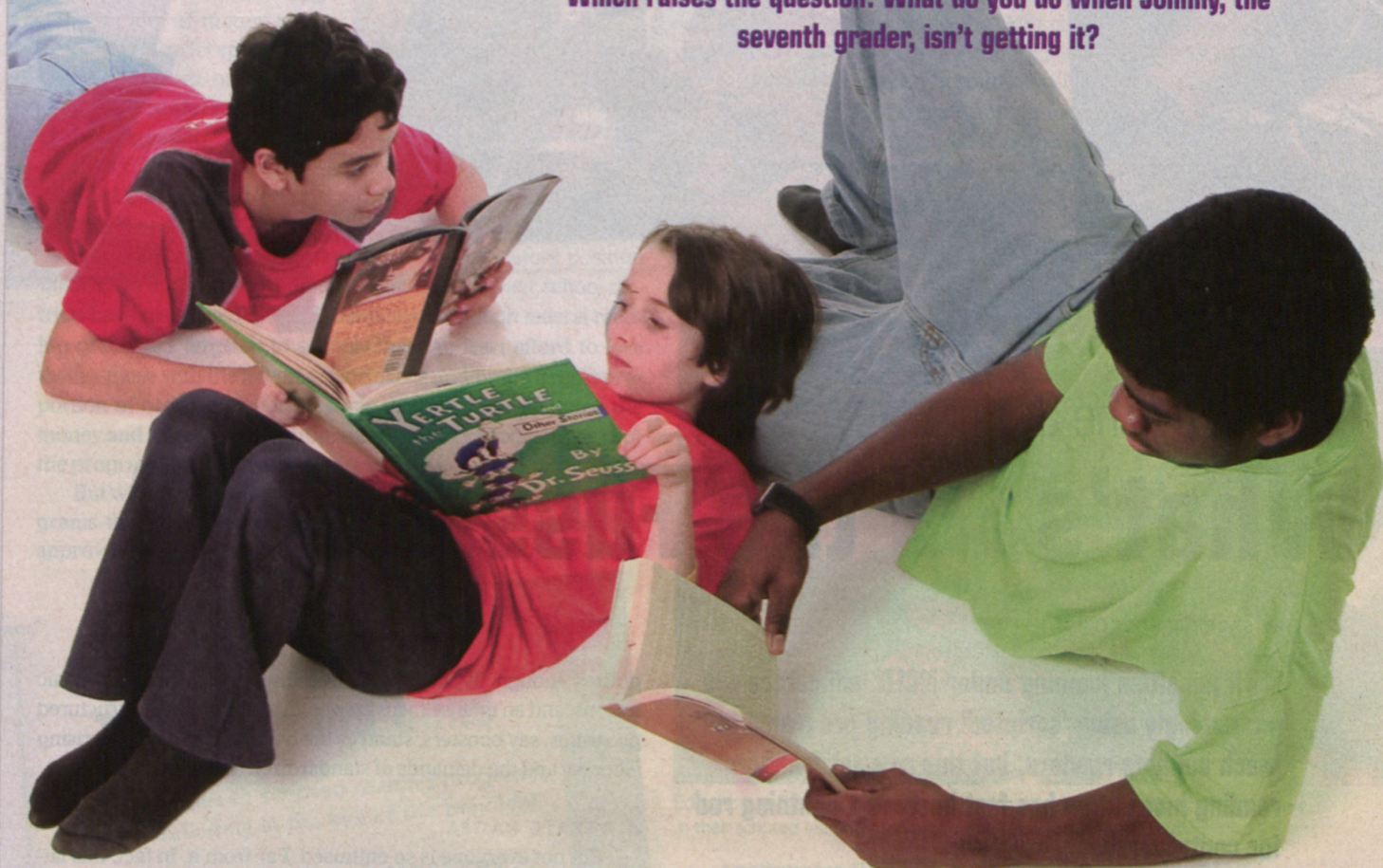
Can All Your Kids Read?

Helping kids understand—and love—the written word has never been the exclusive task of the elementary teacher. Yet the hubbub around instruction and motivation often stops in the early grades. Which raises the question: What do you do when Johnny, the seventh grader, isn't getting it?



Think for a moment: When was the last time you read a comic book or pored through a slamming book of poetry? Been a while? It might not be a bad idea to reacquaint yourself, as more and more educators are doing in an attempt to put some spark into the reading lives of their students. With the demands to raise reading scores front and center under the so-called No Child Left Behind law (NCLB), many are finding a new urgency in trying to reach reluctant or struggling readers, young and old.

And while many say testing is hardly the right incentive—no one test can determine whether someone will be an accomplished, lifelong reader—educators across curricula and grade levels know they all have a stake in how kids develop as readers. After all, they say, once Johnny leaves Mrs. Murray's kindergarten class, his ability to read will play a large part in his success or lack of it when he shows up in eighth-grade science.

So on the eve of the kickoff of NEA's Read Across America events, *NEA Today* takes a look at the latest reading trends from kindergarten through high school. Find out how NEA members are taking the struggle out of reading—and putting the fun back.

FOR THE BEGINNER. **Now it's scripted vs. student-focused instruction—what's the big controversy, and how is NCLB tipping the scales? (See page 22.)**

BUT IT DOESN'T END AT FIFTH GRADE. **The latest and coolest ways to reach reluctant adolescent readers. How about comic books and graphic novels? (See page 26.)**

IS ANYBODY READING ANYMORE? **America is fast becoming a nation of "aliterates"—people who can read but don't—and it's affecting our kids. How NEA's Read Across America is fighting the battle with programs and partnerships. (See page 28.)**

PHOTO: DANNY PECK

Reading by the Script:

What's All the Fuss About?

BY SABRINA HOLCOMB

With penalties looming under NCLB, educators are increasingly using 'scripted' reading programs to teach budding readers, but this newest trend in reading instruction has fast become a lightning rod for controversy.

As if sparks had hit midway through their reading lesson, the cheery kindergartners pop up from their seats and strike an attitude. Pretending to hold a mirror with one hand and brush their hair with the other, they sway their hips side to side and with a touch of Southern sass chant, "Look-in' good, look-in' good!"

It's not just comic relief. These students at Baseline Elementary School in Little Rock, Arkansas, are looking—and sounding—good, indeed. Their reading scores have soared in the last few years, and this jazzy cheer is their celebration—one of many they've happily learned, courtesy of the scripted reading program Baseline's teachers credit for the reading turnaround. "For years, we had one of the lowest reading scores in the district," says third-grade teacher Wilfred Dunn. "This year, we showed the greatest gain of any school in the entire state."

For Baseline, scripted reading programs—on the rise across the country—have been a boon, and some teachers can't sing their praises enough. Typified by standardized instruction, formulaic lessons, and an intense focus on phonics—these highly structured programs, say boosters, stand as the best defense against a rising illiteracy and the demands of standardized testing.

A DEBATE RAGES

But not everyone is so enthused. Far from it. In fact, this latest trend in reading instruction has sparked a debate so fierce that some educators question whether kids being taught today will ever become thoughtful, discriminating readers who can actually grasp a book's real meaning—much less subtext.

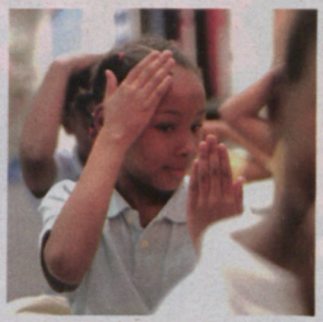
What's the fuss about? The most fervent detractors say scripted programs cast publishers as producers, reading coaches as directors, and teachers and students as mere actors in someone else's play. Many complain they take away teachers' ability to make informed, creative choices for their students. "They take the professionalism out of the profession," says Dawn Christiana, a reading teacher in Bellingham, Washington. "You don't have to think; you don't have to modify; you just script." Others say the programs are nothing more than quick fixes for school districts on a desperate search for the Holy Grail of reading instruction—programs that raise reading scores in time to avoid penalties under the so-called No Child Left Behind law.

Notably, critics say, scripted programs are the ones that get the

PHOTO TOP THIS PAGE: NATHAN HAM; OPPOSITE PAGE: CHRIS DEAN
BOOK PHOTO: PHOTODISC

heartiest sanction under the rules of NCLB's Reading First legislation, which only grants federal monies to districts that use "scientific researched-based" reading programs. Since Reading First was launched three years ago, the use of scripted programs appears to have risen sharply and educators are taking note.

"NCLB is shaping the way reading is being taught," says John Cromshow, a Los Angeles kindergarten teacher whose district uses a scripted program despised widely by many of its educators. "Districts are feeling the pressure to use scripted programs that have been sanctioned by the current administration," Cromshow continues, noting, "There's lots of money to be made. The district spends millions of dollars on reading coaches, conferences, and program training."



NOT ALL BLACK AND WHITE

But there are areas of gray, and where educators position themselves in the dispute depends a lot on how their school districts have responded to NCLB demands. Although federal reading grants are targeted to schools that can least afford to lose them—those with the lowest performance and/or the largest proportion of neediest students—some districts have shunned the money and adopted more progressive literacy programs or kept the programs they currently use.

But where districts have complied and adopted scripted programs that have a Reading First "good housekeeping seal of approval," the viability of those programs, says Cathy Roller, director of Research and Policy for the International Reading Association, has depended largely on a potpourri of local decisions: which specific program gets chosen, the attitude of reading coaches, the availability of extra support and, most important, the extent to which teachers have a voice in the process.

Baseline Elementary in Little Rock, the teachers there admit, was fortunate to have the right combination of all these factors.

A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Even though Baseline's reading program, Success for All (SFA), is one of the most highly scripted programs on the market, Baseline's teachers agreed from the start that its structure was an advantage. "This program is the right choice for the kids in our community," explains teacher Wilfred Dunn. "It may not be right for the kids across town, but southwest Little Rock is the 'hood.' A large percentage of our kids are in foster care, so they don't have a stable home environment. Some come to school without any sleep or food. Our kids have no structure in their lives; they need the structure of this program."

Educators at Baseline Elementary School in Arkansas use a variety of techniques in their scripted reading program to get kids excited about reading.

Another plus: Baseline's teachers feel supported rather than "spied on" by their literacy coach and program facilitator, Mary Jane McDonald, unlike in other places where teachers feel put upon by coaches they bemoan as "reading police."

"Our coach asks for our input," says Barbara Garner, a third-grade teacher whose degree is in literacy. I don't feel Mary is critiquing me. I feel she's monitoring how the program works." McDonald makes sure the program is implemented according to the script but "the script is there to familiarize teachers with the lesson," she says, "not to be read word by word."

The relationship has paid off. Four years ago, 85 percent of Baseline's students scored below the proficient level on the state reading exam. Last year, 85 percent scored proficient or above. Which is why teachers at Baseline don't just love the program—"I'm obsessed with it," admits second-grade teacher Darrel Sharp, who has been teaching for 33 years. Notes Shantel Fells, one of Baseline's three full-time

By the Script: The Pros and Cons

When it comes to scripted reading programs, value is definitely in the eye of the beholder.

Supporters say scripted programs . . .

- ☺ provide consistent, reliable instruction
- ☺ provide a solid foundation for beginning readers
- ☺ are strong on phonics
- ☺ help guide beginning teachers
- ☺ require less preplanning and set-up work for teachers
- ☺ help raise test scores

Critics say scripted programs . . .

- ☹ are weak on comprehension and good literature
- ☹ are inflexible and not well-balanced
- ☹ leave no room for individualized instruction
- ☹ shortchange beginning teachers
- ☹ limit teacher choices
- ☹ lead to declining test scores in the upper grades

Top: Kindergartners in **Ashley Outlaw's** class "move and groove" as they perform the "Looking Good" cheer to congratulate themselves for a job well done. Opposite page: (left) A fourth-grade student in Felix Quiñónez' tech-savvy classroom videotapes her classmates for a reading project. (right) Quiñónez uses a high-tech "Activ Board" (an interactive white board) to teach a reading lesson.

reading tutors: "I start working with them on the Word Board on Monday and by Friday, *Bam!*, my babies can read those words just like everyone else in the class."

In fact, the entire staff felt so strongly about the program that when they were encouraged to use Arkansas Reading First—a more flexible and less scripted program—during the 2003–04 school year, Principal Eleanor Cox successfully advocated for the return of SFA. "Impoverished children don't arrive here as astute grammarians," says Cox. "Their parents send us the best they have. We work with them and by the time they reach fourth grade, they've got a foundation."

Cox recounts the remarkable progress of one fourth-grade student who was "reading" on a preK level in second grade but had caught up by fourth grade. This year, she ran for vice president of the student council, writing and delivering her own campaign speech. Cox admits this kind of success story would not have been possible without the buy-in of the staff. "If you don't have collaboration," says Cox, "you're just spinning your wheels."

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

It's a lesson the teachers and administrators in the Los Angeles school district have learned all too well. In sharp contrast to Little Rock, many teachers in Los Angeles bitterly resent Open Court, the scripted reading program widely used throughout the district and the state.

Phoebe Conn, a kindergarten teacher at El Sereno Elementary School in Los Angeles, describes what she sees as the main flaw in the Open Court program. "It's boring," she says flatly. "It stifles initiative and creativity and frustrates everyone—students and teachers. When they give the Teacher of the Year Award, they always give it to wonderfully creative teachers. They don't give it for reading a script—'This woman can really read like a metronome!'—and God help us, let's hope they never do."

"When we first piloted Open Court at my school," Conn adds, "six experienced kindergarten teachers all turned thumbs down. It wasn't age appropriate. It's a very slow program and four- and five-year-old children need to be more involved in learning."

SAY THAT IN SPANISH

"As hideous as Open Court is in English, just cube that in Spanish," says outspoken bilingual kindergarten teacher Sheryl Ortega. Ortega teaches at Logan Elementary School, where 80–90 percent of the students are English-language learners.

Test Scores: **Do They Add Up?**

Test results "make the grade," say supporters of scripted reading programs.

Early studies suggested Open Court students performed better than students taught with a literature-based curriculum. An independent study commissioned by publisher McGraw-Hill maintained that California schools using Open Court showed marked jumps in children's literacy skills and significantly improved test scores compared with other programs.

The test scores are misleading, say some researchers.

One study done by Margaret Heiss Moustafa, a professor of literacy education at California State University in Los Angeles, found that the percentage of children scoring at or above the 50th percentile on California's SAT 9 reading exam was significantly lower in schools with scripted programs. Several

PHOTO TOP: CHRIS DEAN; OPPOSITE PAGE: BOB RIHA JR. BOOK PHOTO: PHOTODISC

When the Los Angeles school district decided to align its Spanish and English reading programs, Ortega was asked to serve on the advisory task force, along with 11 bilingual teachers and 11 district representatives. The task force reviewed two programs—McGraw-Hill's Foro Abierto (the Spanish version of Open Court) and Houghton Mifflin's Lectura. "We had four hours to pick a series, a process that usually takes months," says Ortega. By the end of the day, all but one member had voted for Lectura because Foro Abierto, explains Ortega, "is a literal translation of the English program and therefore linguistically incorrect in Spanish."

Shockingly, the committee's recommendation was rejected—mainly because schools were already using Open Court in English. After an uproar from bilingual teachers, the superintendent relented and allowed K–2 teachers to use Lectura. But Foro Abierto is still used in the upper grades, and while it's not desirable, says Ortega, "teachers have accommodated, as they've always done, inventing their own materials to make instruction work." When word gets around that the series is successful, "it's in fact due to teachers' professional expertise," she says.

TEACHERS MAKE IT WORK

Although Ortega believes experienced teachers can make up for some of the deficits in scripted programs, she worries that beginning teachers aren't getting the training they need to provide rich, high-quality reading instruction. "We've got hundreds of young students coming out of teacher programs at the universities," says Ortega, "and they're only being trained how to deliver Open Court and not how to teach."

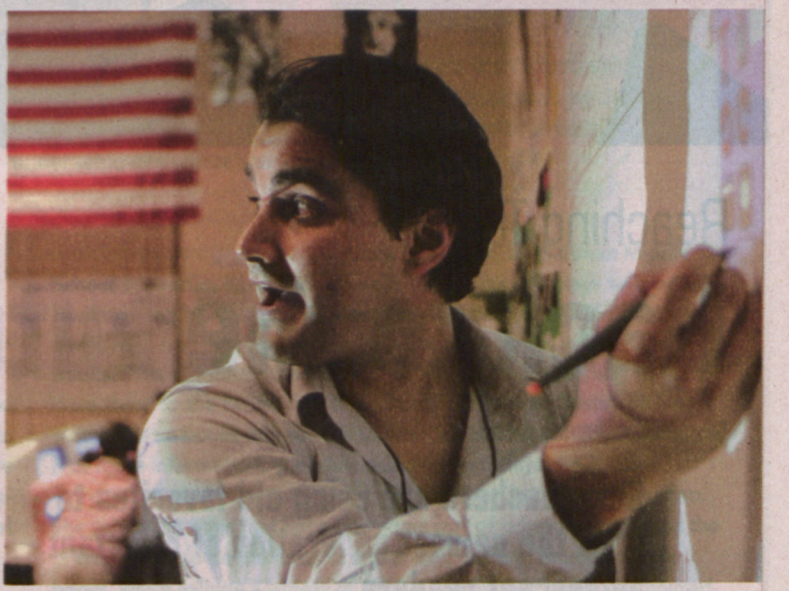
Ortega's co-workers agree the "teacher factor" is a critical component in the ultimate success of a scripted program. James Lopez, a fifth-grade teacher at Logan, confesses, "I go off-script. How else will all my kids get individual attention?"

"It's more work," says fourth-grade teacher Felix Quiñónez, whose classroom is down the hall, "but personalized instruction has a greater impact."

Like many teachers in the higher grades, Quiñónez worries that scripted reading programs overemphasize phonics at the cost of comprehension. "I teach to understand," says Quiñónez, who is currently working on his National Board Certification. "You can't have breadth with no depth."

But Siegfried Engelmann, a professor of education at the University of Oregon and author of the scripted program Direct Instruction, vigorously disputes this portrayal of scripted reading programs. "Direct Instruction's comprehension performance exceeds its decoding performance. You don't teach comprehension through reading in the early grades; you teach comprehension through oral instruction. "

The comprehension issue is a particular concern to critics who note the widespread use of scripted programs in low-income, minority communities, where administrators have felt the most pressure to raise reading scores. Many now ask: Will low-income kids suffer in the upper grades without access to the same rich, multifaceted reading instruction their peers currently get in more successful schools? Some educators say there's a reason to be concerned. Studies of scripted programs over the last five years have found that reading scores are declining in the higher grades and that poor and minority students in some districts are as far behind as they ever were.



THE BOTTOM LINE

When it comes to teaching Johnny to read, there's a growing consensus among educators that no single magic bullet will lead to reading success or failure. Many teachers believe the best reading instruction allows teachers the flexibility to address the full spectrum of reading skills and diverse student needs.

NCLB has created a need for reproducible reading instruction that guarantees quick results, says NEA reading specialist Barbara Kapinus. "But in all of our emphasis on raising test scores," she cautions, "we can't lose sight of the fact that one score on one reading test does not equal being able, or willing, to read."

studies have found that reading scores started to decline in the higher grades, as comprehension skills become increasingly important. But Siegfried Engelmann, author of the scripted program Direct Instruction (DI), counters, "The scores for all students—groups, not individuals—drop somewhat after third grade no matter what type of program you're using. When DI is well-implemented, the scores drop less than any other program out there."

What about national vs. state scores?

Experts caution that any good news about student reading performance must be put in a national context. For example, 80 percent of students in a state may test proficient on the state exam, while only 20 percent test proficient on the rigorous NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) reading assessment, which includes high-level comprehension questions that require an in-depth understanding of the text.

Reaching Teens:

Back to the Future

BY THOMAS GRILLO

How teachers are using old favorites to hook the newest generation of reluctant adolescent readers.

Terri Kirk, a high school librarian in Paducah, Kentucky, was looking for a way to inspire adolescent males to read more, so on a whim she asked a student to recommend a few comics and graphic novels. Now, she says, "I can't keep these books in the library. I can hardly check them in before they're checked out. The kids just devour them."

For Kirk—and surprisingly, many of her colleagues across the country—pointing students to the likes of X-Men and Elektra has been one creative, and apparently successful, inroad into a problem many say demands out-of-the-box thinking.

Face it: Some students spend several years in school and still have trouble reading. A recent RAND Corporation survey shows that in most states, a third or more of the middle school students don't read "proficiently," according to the state's own definition of that term.

Of course, middle and high school educators don't need a study to tell them they have poor readers. But what's a teacher to do? Many feel ill-equipped to help older non-readers, as it's in the primary grades where the perennial fights over best strategies percolate—and where educators find most reading research focused. But increasingly, middle school and high school educators are crafting new approaches using everything from comic books to poetry slams to reach and help that student who can't or won't find fun and facts in a book.

Grant it, teachers aren't replacing Shakespeare with Spiderman. But in an age where students are raised on images in movies, TV, video, and computer games, educators find comics connecting with students in a way traditional literature can't.

Maryland education officials recently announced plans to start using comics statewide next school year, from kindergarten into high school. "You see kids reading comic books, buying comic books, and they seem totally engrossed," Maryland state schools Superintendent Nancy Grasmick told *The Washington Post*. "It looks like there's really some potential here."

Comics aren't limited to superheroes. Art Spiegelman's Holocaust memoir *Maus*, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, tells in chilling detail how his parents survived the Holocaust. There's a *Maus* study guide online at: www.chfestival.org/resources/content/ComicBookLessonPlan.pdf.

Kirk's students especially like a Japanese comic form called

ILLUSTRATION: DIGITALVISION

"anime" (short for animation) that's become wildly popular over the last few years. Anime, known for its highly stylized and intricate artwork, spans a wide range of topics. "The students reading anime are not poor readers," says Kirk. "Anime comics are not easy to read because you have to read them back to front."

Steve Replogle, himself a lifelong comic book fan, introduced *Bone* comics to his Denver fourth graders nearly five years ago. The *Bone* series, by Jeff Smith, tells the story of three cousins who find their way into a hidden, pre-technological valley filled with wonderful and terrifying creatures.

"I use comics specifically to reach kids who don't like books," he says. "I needed something cool and different that's not as intimidating as a page of text." The response from his students? "They love it. Some kids dive into it with a real joy. Even the kids who love books like comics, too."

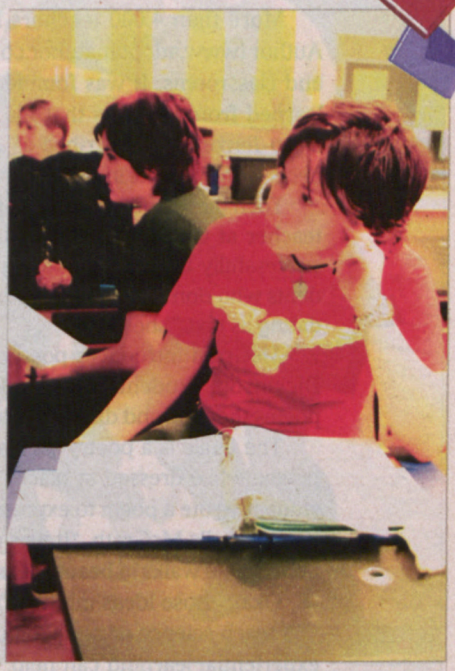
The New York City Comic Book Museum offers a comics curriculum for classroom use at no cost. Challenging Objective Minds: An Instructional Comicbook Series, is being used by dozens of school districts nationwide for elementary, middle, and high school students. For more information, go to www.nyccbm.org.

Robin Brenner, a librarian at the Carey Memorial Library in Lexington, Massachusetts, operates a graphic novel Web site at www.noflyingnotights.com with age-appropriate recommended novels. "Many people still equate comics with trash. But the fastest growing segment of libraries are graphic novel collections because they are visual and engaging and reach reluctant readers," Brenner says.

Conventional print can also hook a student who's steered clear of reading for years. It may just be a matter of finding something that's irresistible.

If your students can't relate to books written by John Steinbeck or Jack London, check out *Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers,* published by the Young Adult Library Services Association: www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/quickpicks.

The notable books that made this year's list include: Sharon Flake's *Begging for Change* about a teen's ambivalent feelings for her drug-addicted father; and *Nightmare,* by Joan Lowery Nixon, about a 16-year-old who's sent to a camp for underachievers where she discovers a murderer.



TEMPTING TEEN READERS

Hot Tips from School Librarians

When it comes to enticing teens to read, middle and high school librarians are borrowing a page from the mega-bookstores that are the favorite new place to "chill" for readers and non-readers alike. Members of the **American Association of School Librarians** and the **NEA Library Caucus** share trade secrets.

COOL PICKS. "Students will listen to their peers," says Terri Kirk at Reidland High School in Paducah, Kentucky. Stack an entire bookshelf with student picks (just like the staff picks at Borders and Barnes and Noble). Or attach cards with student book reviews to the bookshelf under targeted books. Attaching Amazon.com reviews also works.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION. Remember the three most important things in real estate? "Make sure you use prime space in the library to display good books," says Jackie Gould of Regional High School in Mullica Hill, New Jersey. Gould worked with the school's marketing teacher and students on a project to "sell" library books. Their ideas: Keep new books at the circulation desk, where students can see them as they're checking books out. Set up separate shelves for mystery, science-fiction, and fantasy, the topics most popular with teens. Gould also makes the most of artifacts: Last September she added poetry and art by students to a display case of books on the events of September 11.

THE PLAY'S THE THING. Chris Gustafson, at Whitman Middle School in Seattle, Washington, uses reader's theater plays to introduce books during her fall library orientation for incoming students. Students read from scripts Gustafson has written, based on passages from books. "The students love it," says Gustafson. "It's a fun way to introduce them to the books they'll read during the year. Gustafson has written three books on reader's theater for teachers and librarians. (For more information, see www.nea.org/neatodayextra.)

COFFEE CAN OF PROBABILITY. Another Gustafson brainstorm. She selects 50 titles that have won some sort of prize or recognition the previous year to be the focus of a year-long reading promotion. The books, which include a variety of genres and reading levels, are housed in a separate bookcase with a special spine label to identify them. When a student reads one of the books, his or her name goes in a coffee can. Two names are drawn from the can each week and the winners receive a gift certificate donated by a local bookstore or fast food restaurant. Winners' names are posted on the circulation desk and published in the school bulletin.

PUMP UP THE VOLUME. Audio books can be a real help to struggling readers, who benefit from hearing, as well as seeing, the written word. Students can listen to books as they drive their cars back and forth to school and work. An added benefit: listening and comprehending is a core curriculum content standard in many states.

GIVE IT A FACE-LIFT. Order new editions of old favorites. No one wants to read grubby copies with dated book jackets and pages falling out of the seams. Don't underestimate the power of a beautiful new book jacket with up-to-date artwork, say librarians.

BAM

PHOTO: NATHAN HAM

More than 4,000 teachers have registered at Adopt-An-Author (www.adoptanauthor.com), a Web site that links authors and classrooms. It was founded by novelist Steve Alten, who learned from teachers that his first thriller, *MEG: A Novel of Deep Terror,* best described as *Jaws* meets *Jurassic Park*—connects with students in a way that classics could not.

Then there's poetry, which Lynne McGrath, a seventh-grade teacher at the Hanscom, Massachusetts, Air Force Base uses successfully to reach unwilling readers. "Poetry engages students who don't enjoy reading because poems are not as intimidating as text," she says.

McGrath introduces poetry from Shel Silverstein to Emily Dickinson. Students write down lines they enjoy and what poems they like and dislike, and then talk about the work.

The finale is a poetry slam where students present original poems while dressed in black "beatnik" style. One 13-year-old student wrote a poem to express his crush on a girl in the classroom, recalls McGrath. "It was modeled after Lord Byron's and began "She walks in beauty, like the night…"

Okay, those ideas might work in English class. But what if you teach science or social studies? Well-designed visuals and experiential learning can help, but almost all teachers depend on the printed word to get much of the curriculum across. So what can you do about students who can read a passage, but just can't seem to get the idea?

Pamela Tobiczyk, along with more than 300 other teachers in Arkansas, Virginia, and Michigan, may have found an answer with a new training program geared to adolescents.

The Michigan Content Literacy: Assessments, Standards and Strategies (MiCLASS), is a 24-hour training program for teachers in all content areas on strategies for helping weak readers get more out of what they read.

"These strategies are about getting students to organize information and think about it, not just memorize it," says NEA reading specialist Barbara Kapinus. "In the process of organizing and reorganizing, you think about it more deeply so you understand it better."

Tobiczyk, a sixth-grade teacher in Clinton Township believes her students benefit from what she learned in MiCLASS. For years, she has taught *Tuck Everlasting,* Natalie Babbitt's classic novel about young Winnie Foster's choice of whether to drink from a fountain of youth. But today she's teaching it differently.

She used to have students answer questions about plot and setting. Now, Tobiczyk's classroom is alive with debate about whether it's a good idea to live forever and whether breaking the law is ever justified. (Winnie helps one character escape from jail.)

"We still examine story elements, but I encourage debate," she says. "During a heated discussion one student asked, 'Why would anyone want to live forever if their family would be dead?' Another said, 'if you had forever, you could see the world.'"

Jon Obermeyer, a middle school special needs teacher in Roscommon, Michigan, and a MiCLASS proponent, says the program changed his approach. "I was always the person who gave the knowledge and I decided what they would learn. Now, the kids are taking responsibility for their learning," he says.

NEA's Read Across America:

Is There a Doctor in the House?

BY RACHAEL WALKER

More and more Americans are choosing not to read. Which is worse? Not reading because you can't or because you won't?

When was the last time you picked up a book and read for your own pleasure? Not a magazine. Not a Web page. An actual book with characters and a plot. Can't remember when? You could be one of the millions suffering from aliteracy.

That's aliteracy, not illiteracy. Aliteracy strikes those who can read but choose not to. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, more than half of America's adult population isn't reading literature, and this malady isn't limited to adults. Aliterate students may never become strong, fully engaged readers.

NEA's Read Across America and the March 2 birthday celebration of Dr. Seuss provide a day of reading excitement to focus attention on reading. But the good Doctor can't inoculate against all the ills of aliteracy, so NEA offers a year-round calendar of activities, programs, partnerships, and resources to help get kids of all ages wanting to read. Here are just a few of the partners and programs that have kids reading across America all year.

PHOTO: SANDY SCHAEFFER

PRESCRIPTION FOR SOON-TO-BE READERS

What's the cure for children as young as two years of age who watch more than three hours of television daily? Doctors and nurses who participate in the Reach Out and Read (ROR) program think they've found it: regularly prescribe reading and make sure there are books in the home. The Reach Out and Read program trains medical providers to advise parents about the importance of reading aloud and to give books to children at pediatric check-ups from six months to five years of age. The more than 2,000 ROR programs throughout the country also depend on volunteers to demonstrate the joys of reading aloud to children by sharing books with families in pediatric waiting rooms.

Recent research shows that ROR is having direct effects on literacy development: children are more experienced with books and have the language skills they need for reading acquisition. Educators in the Virginia State Reading Association have recognized the benefits ROR brings into the classroom, have adopted several Virginia ROR sites, and are working hard to spread the word in their communities to all doctors. Says Elli Sparks, the coordinator for the Virginia Coalition of Reach Out and Read programs, "Educators know their communities so well. Without their outreach, we couldn't begin to reach the doctors whose patients can really use the ROR program. Their help in providing books, volunteers, and funding to local clinics and hospitals ensures a regular dose of reading for hundreds of low-income children."

EXERCISE FOR THE BODY, MIND, AND SOUL

Movies and popcorn go together, kind of like teachers and classrooms. But soccer and poetry? Sometimes it takes an unusual combination to get kids' attention. America SCORES thinks it has found the right mix, and so do the thousands of kids who benefit from the innovative after-school program that uses soccer games and poetry classes to help urban students score in the classroom and on the playground.

How does this combo work? America SCORES sets up a soccer league at a public school. Students who sign up for the league play soccer three days a week and get creative writing instruction the other two days from teachers who serve as writing and soccer coaches. The rules are simple. No poetry, no soccer. Fortunately, that's not a problem because poetry classes have become a huge hit with the children. "The kids love it because poetry has no parameters, there's no judgment," says Eden Mendel, national director of Public Relations, Marketing, and Education for America SCORES. "It's the opposite of testing. The kids are motivated and encouraged to express their ideas and emotions when teachers have the freedom to say yes."

Opposite page: Students make reading come alive with puppet theater.
Top: The team scores one for reading at an America SCORES soccer game.
Bottom: "Cats in Hats" celebrate NEA's Read Across America Day.
Next page: Vietnamese teens help refugee children learn to read.

PHOTO TOP: CHARLIE WELCH; BOTTOM: READ ACROSS AMERICA; RAA IMAGE: TM & © 1997 DR. SEUSS ENTERPRISES, L.P. AND NEA. CAT IN THE HAT IMAGE TM & © 1957 DR. SEUSS ENTERPRISES, L.P. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED; PHOTO NEXT PAGE: VIET YOUTH BOARD

America SCORES—started 10 years ago by a Washington, D.C., teacher—has grown from a local grassroots project to a nationwide program. Educators from around the country attend an intensive 10-day workshop at the University of Iowa where they learn new methods for using poetry as a gateway to literacy.

A DOSE OF THEIR OWN MEDICINE

When their most important issue is what to wear to school tomorrow, picking up a book and reading for fun doesn't always occur to middle school kids. So it's up to teachers and parents to help these reluctant readers connect the worlds they don't know to the worlds they do know.

Since television and the Internet are often the main pull away from books, educators can use multimedia to help students recognize the relationships between their culture and other communities. PBS TeacherSource can direct educators to a wide variety of multimedia opportunities to engage students. For example, a search for middle school and American literature leads you to the series American Roots Music. Here they can find a video series, a teacher's guide, and a companion Web site to talk about the diverse musical styles of blues, gospel, traditional country, zydeco, tejano, and Native American pow-wow and relate them to the American storytelling tradition and literature.

INFECTIOUS READING

"Readers are Leaders" is more than a catchy reading promotion slogan—it's true! The National Endowment for the Arts reports literary readers are more committed to their communities than those suffering from aliteracy. They are more supportive of cultural events, visit museums, and are more than two-and-a-half times as likely to do volunteer or charity work.

Since 2000, NEA has encouraged and celebrated literacy service by America's young people and honored them for doing reading-related activities that benefit others. In partnership with Youth Service America (YSA), thousands of dollars have been awarded to student-led literacy projects through the Youth Leaders for Literacy program.

"Being able to read makes everything else possible, including the ability to make meaningful, lifelong contributions to your community through service," said Steven A. Culbertson, YSA president and CEO. The Chandler High School Social Studies Council in Chandler, Arizona, knows that's true. They paired trained Council members with fourth graders at Galveston Elementary to help beef up students' reading skills, teach them about citizenship, and offer them opportunities to participate in community improvement activities. What they found was that stronger leaders and readers emerged from both age groups—fourth graders' interests and skills went up and high school mentors' interest in reading grew as they shared reading and built relationships with a younger reader. nea

Talk to us on the Web!

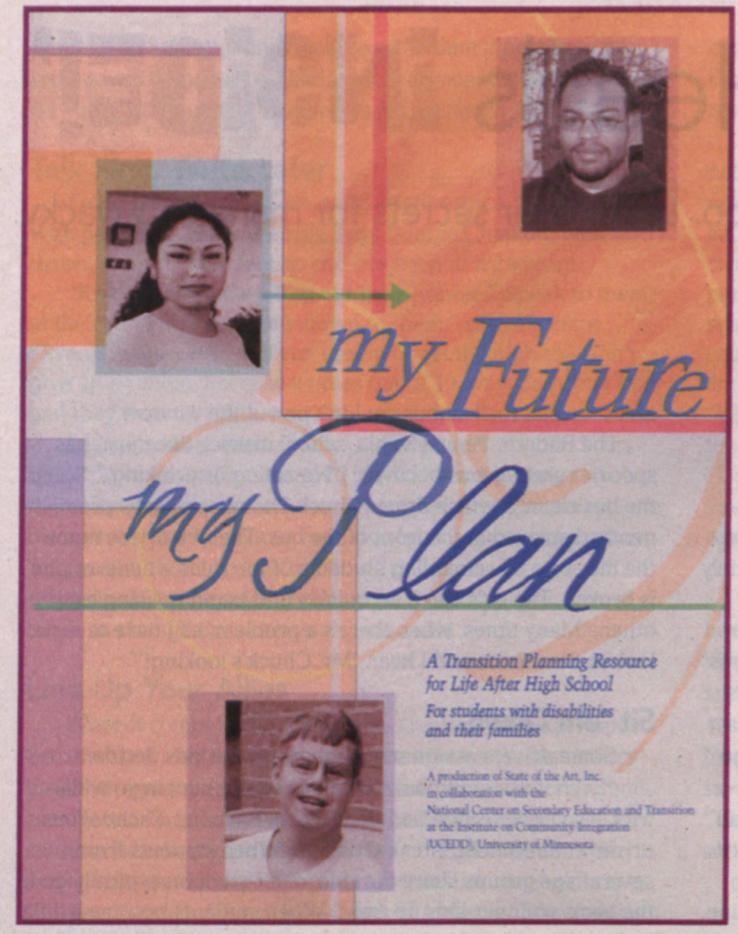
Want to get and share more ideas about reading? Go to www.nea.org/neatodayextra!

➜ Answer our **online survey question:** Do you think the use of comic books is an effective teaching tool?

➜ Join our **discussion board conversation** and let your colleagues in on your best ideas to hook reluctant readers.

➜ Find out more about **NEA's Read Across America** programs and activities.

➜ Tap into a host of **NEA resources** on reading, including books, teaching strategies, and more tips from school librarians.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Shipping charges will be added to each order.

Life doesn't end after high school

But for students with disabilities, planning for that transition can be challenging. Now, students with IEPs are required by law to have a transition plan in place by age 14.

My Future My Plan is a transition planning resource that encourages early, student-centered transition planning for students with disabilities. This three-part resource includes:

- A 30-minute videotape and discussion guide
- A workbook guiding students through every important area of transition planning, including: self-advocacy, legal rights, IEP meetings, health, post-secondary education, employment, adult services, transportation, and others
- A 36-page companion guide to the student workbook with suggestions for teachers and family members on how they can support students in the transition planning process

'Hands OFF, Heads INSIDE!'

School bus drivers have to keep order, too. Learn their secrets for managing wacky behavior—and traffic—at the same time.

BY JOHN O'NEIL

If you've ever car-pooled the soccer team or ferried the kids on a four-hour trip to grandma's, you know the feeling. You need to focus on the road, but the kids are noisily goofing off, or getting on each others' nerves—and yours. Welcome to the world of school bus drivers, who somehow keep those gleaming yellow buses rolling safely with two or three classrooms full of students behind them.

School bus drivers deal with it all—from frogs set loose under the seats to garden-variety shrieking, poking, and arms out the windows—and they do it with their backs to the kids.

Even the seasons bring variations on bus buffoonery. Last spring, when 17-year cicadas swarmed the East Coast, some found their way into the buses, where cut-ups relished the chance to torment their insect-o-phobic peers, reports Tracie Kloc, a bus driver in Sterling, Virginia. In autumn, kids hoard acorns in their backpacks or pockets and wing them at stop signs or mailboxes, says Tampa, Florida, bus driver Josephine Alvarez. Come wintertime, it's snowballs.

When skilled drivers keep things cool on the bus, kids carry the vibe out of the bus and right into their classrooms. Here's how veteran drivers keep the peace and the wheels rolling:

Lay Down the Law

"Set down the ground rules at the beginning of the year," Sam Anderson, a driver instructor in California's Redlands Unified school district, tells new drivers. "Then there's no question a month later that they never knew to keep their feet out of the aisles, or that their hands couldn't be out the window."

The Radnor, Pennsylvania, school district, like most, has specific rules for bus behavior ("No eating or drinking," "Keep the bus clean"), which driver Chuck Thompson keeps prominently displayed in the front of the bus. Then he drives home the message by reminding students of the rules whenever one is broken. The kids catch on quickly and begin policing each other. "Many times, when there's a problem, all I have to do is look in the mirror and I hear, 'Mr. Chuck's looking!'"

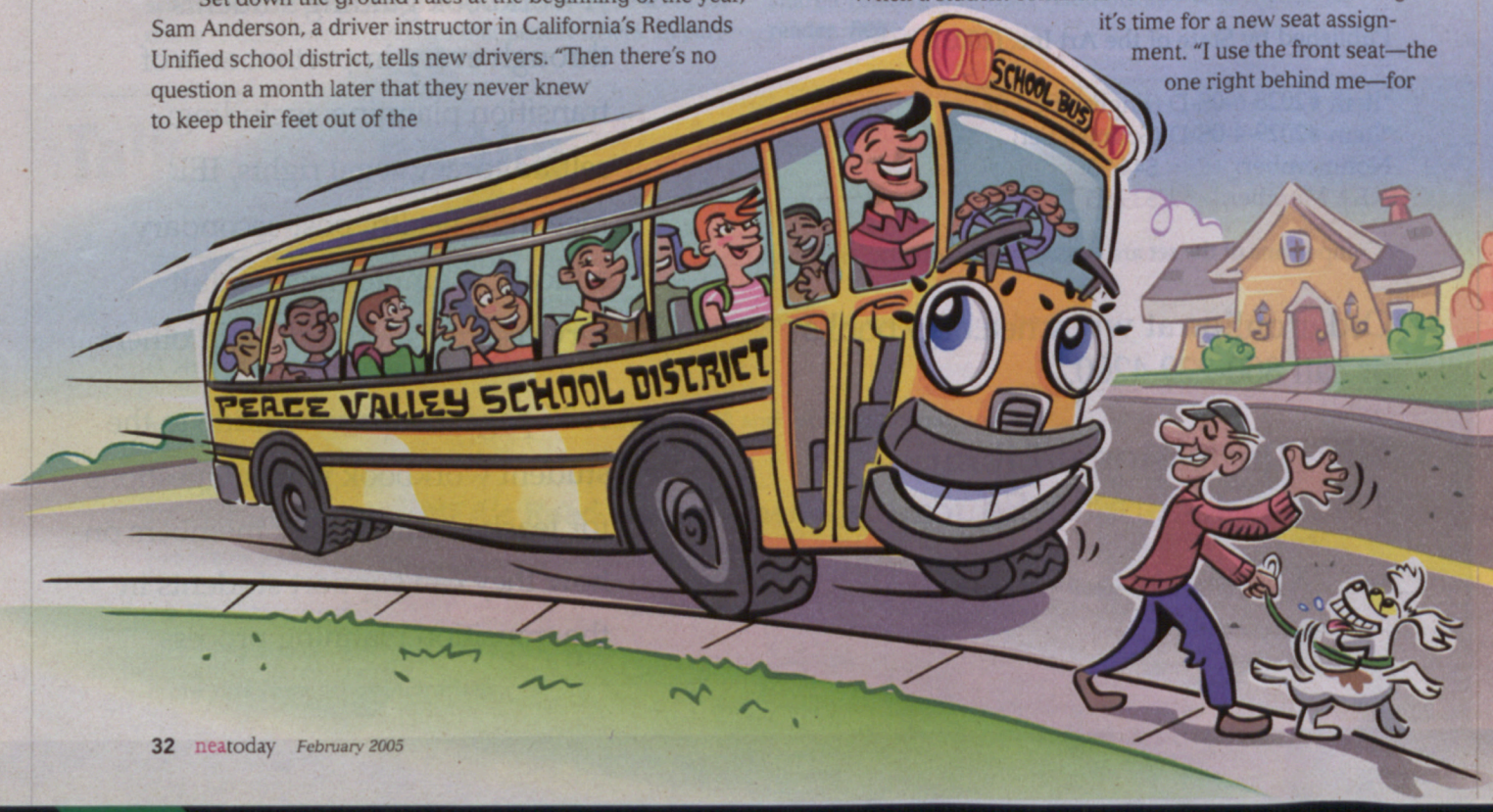
Sit 'em Down

Some drivers assign seats; others let the kids decide.

"Even if assigning seats is not a requirement in your district, it's very effective," advises Teresa Barbour, a school bus driver in Smithfield, North Carolina. When students from several age groups share the ride, older students typically go in the back, younger kids up front. When students become a little too comfortable with their assigned seat—and begin to act up—it's time to change their assignment, she adds.

Alvarez runs a tight ship. She assigns seats and has added a twist for the older kids whose hormones are racing: "Boys sit on the right, girls on the left," she tells them. "And no touching—this is not your makeout place."

When a student continues to misbehave after a warning, it's time for a new seat assignment. "I use the front seat—the one right behind me—for



when a kid acts up, and I'll increase the time if problems persist," says Thompson, who towers over most of his students at 6'1" and 285 pounds. "That seems to quell most disturbances."

Talk First, Write Later

Good behavior feeds on good relationships. And that starts with getting to know the kids, says Bonnie Chalfant, who drives in Erial, New Jersey, and has been at it 24 years.

"Know their names, find out their hobbies. Speak to them at their level and don't talk down to them," says Chalfant. "Even the ones who you can't seem to get through to—don't give up on them, because 9 times out of 10 everybody else has and they think you will, too."

Learning what makes each kid tick builds rapport. Then, when problems arise, talking to that kid is more likely to solve them. If not, Anderson advises drivers to write up a referral for disciplinary action—but to have one last chat with the student. Tell the kid, "Your actions today will determine whether I turn this referral in," he says. "Put it on them and let them know they can change their behavior" and avoid the punishment.

Line Up Your Allies

When it comes to the school bus, familiarity breeds respect. Because they may drive the same routes for years, bus drivers have the opportunity to get to know students, and their parents, even better. The continuity definitely helps with the kids—students who know the bus routines can reinforce them with newer kids—and it makes parents more secure and supportive. "It raises their confidence level," says Thompson. "Their mindset is, 'There's Chuck—he's been coming through this neighborhood for a number of years, and if there's a problem, he'll handle it." And when a child acts up, talking with the parent can make a written referral unnecessary.

Catch It on Film

Video cameras are more common on buses these days, and the tapes—combined with copies of your referrals—can be critical tools for addressing serious behavior, especially when students or their parents dispute what events occurred.

Alvarez sparred last year with a seventh grader who often behaved well but was prone to sudden, serious outbursts. She wrote up multiple referrals but could not get the boy suspended from the bus route until she backed it up with three video clips to support her written documentation. His disbelieving parents couldn't dispute what the tapes showed. After being suspended from the route last year, the boy is back on the route this year—quiet and well-behaved. "He tried me to my limits, and he thought he had the upper hand," says Alvarez. "When the parents saw the video to back up what I had written on the paper, that made the difference."

If you have a camera on your bus, make sure that any time you discipline a child, you do it in front of the camera, adds Anderson, in case your actions are challenged by students or parents later on.

There's no pat formula for keeping a lid on student misbehavior on the bus, but the best drivers seem to understand kids—they know when to crack down and when to let it slide, know when a kid needs a stern talking to or a hug.

"I try to look at the kids as I would one of my own, and treat them with the love and attention they need," says Kroc, who says she was one of the "back of the bus" crowd growing up. "There are days when I can see that all a kid needs is a hug or a smile." Recently, some of the students on her bus runs gave her holiday gifts. "I didn't expect that," she says. "But I expect them to be good and to help keep the bus safe. That's all that matters." nea

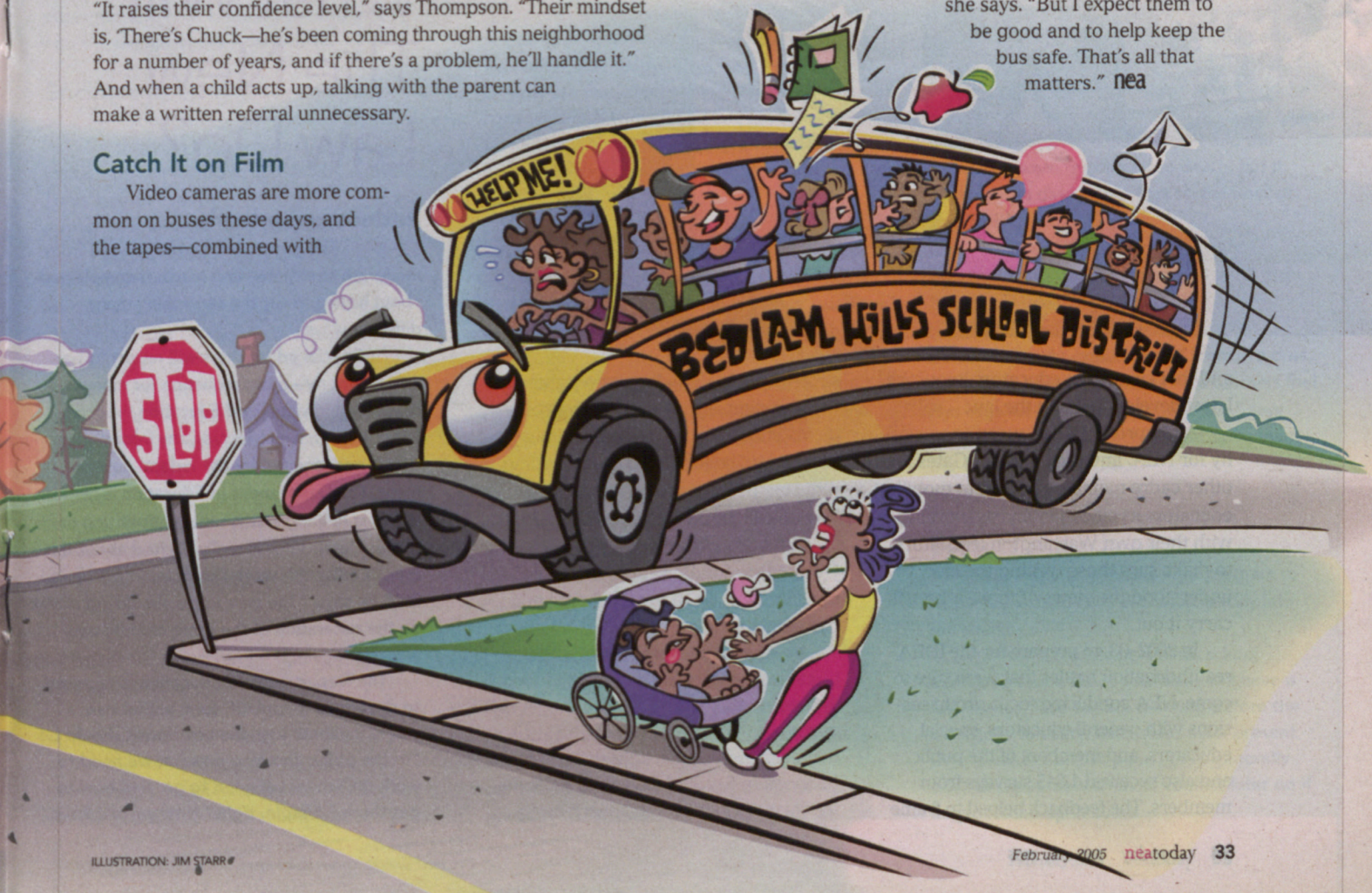


ILLUSTRATION: JIM STARR

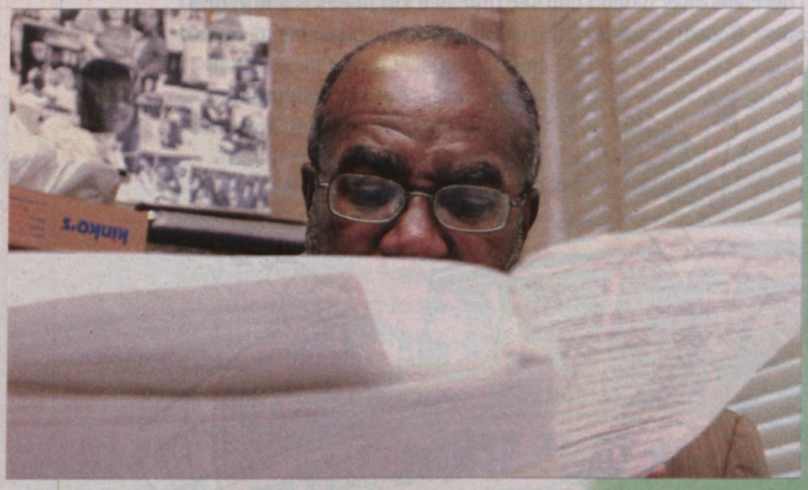
BY CAROLYN WHITE

A Better IDEA

The reauthorized federal education law should help educators reach students faster, more effectively, and with less pointless paperwork.

When Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) on November 19, Daryl Gates, a middle school teacher from Shreveport, Louisiana, felt like Christmas had come early. "This IDEA will put a smile on the face of the average educator and improve the chance his or her students will get a good education," says Gates, who teaches reading and language arts to seventh- and eighth-grade special ed students at Youree Middle School.

While the new law is far from ideal, it's a big improvement, Gates says. He was following the action in Congress very closely because he's one of 26 educators who make up the NEA special education "cadre." They make sure that NEA lobbyists go armed with real classroom stories when they lobby Congress, and that classroom educators know the latest developments in the law.



An improved IDEA was a top priority for NEA, and to achieve it, Gates and other cadre members helped to mobilize educators as citizen lobbyists working with their own Washington legislators to make sure those writing the law understood the views of those who will carry it out.

In 2002–03, to prepare for the IDEA reauthorization battles that were sure to come, NEA conducted focus group sessions with general educators, special educators, and members of the public, and also received 1,845 surveys from members. The feedback helped to frame strategy for the long legislative campaign.

The campaign resulted in improvements in paperwork rules, early intervention, discipline for violent students, and reducing parent-school litigation (see "What Will the New Law Do? at right).

Other important wins:

- More funding for professional development, both for teachers and paraeducators.
- A new guarantee that instructional materials must be provided to kids in a timely manner. "That should get rid of the horror stories about blind students having to wait eight months for a textbook in Braille," says Patti Ralabate, the former Connecticut speech and

What Will The New Law Do?

Reduce paperwork.

BEFORE: The paperwork burden ranged from moderate to extreme and teachers complained about having to say the same thing many different ways.

NOW: Special ed teachers will report to parents quarterly—a big reduction for many teachers. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) won't have to include any information that is not required by the federal government. The Department of Education is responsible for helping states reduce repetition on forms. Daryl Gates is really excited about this one. "Earlier this week I completed a 25-page IEP," he says. "The new forms should cut down on the reiteration of the same old info over and over again."

The Department of Education is required to develop a model IEP form within two years. Ralabate says the new forms should be "to the point, focusing on what we need to work on, where we need to go, and how to get there." Simple, right? Now we just have

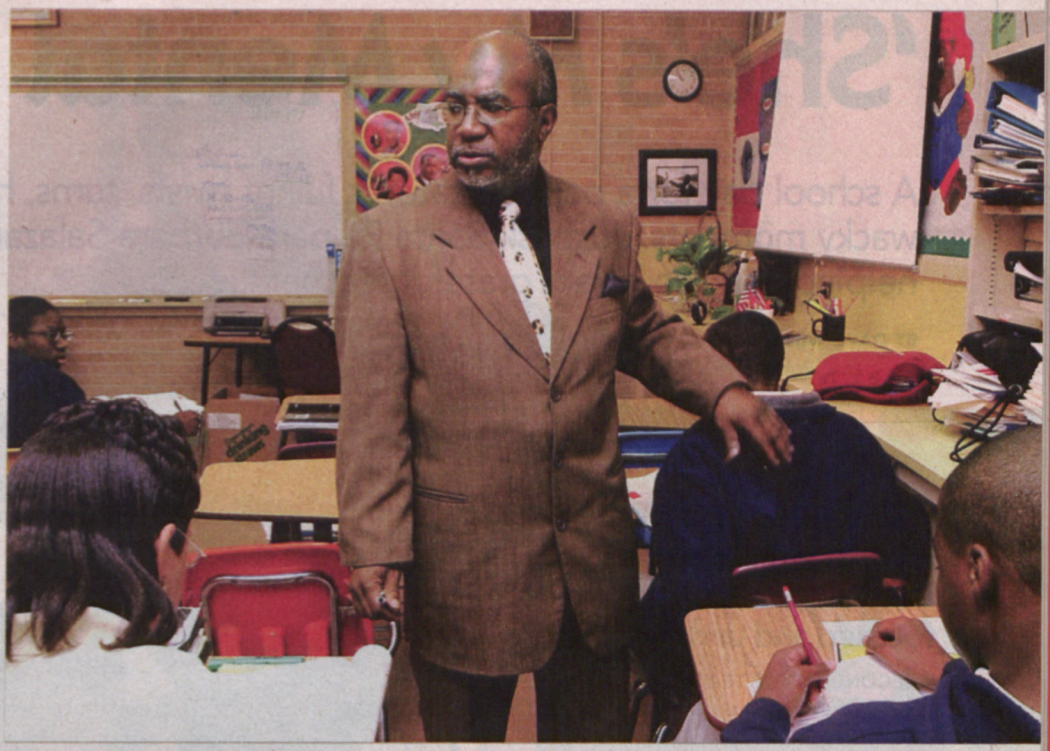
language pathologist who heads up NEA's special education efforts.

On the other hand, the law falls short in some important areas, Ralabate says. "They missed the mark with funding and on the definition of highly qualified for special ed teachers," she says.

On the "highly qualified teacher" issue, NEA got half a loaf—more reasonable rules, but not reasonable enough. On funding, there is still no guarantee that Washington will live up to its 1975 promise to pay 40 percent of the cost of special education any time soon.

Some of NEA's biggest victories were in keeping some proposals out of the new law, especially vouchers and a proposal to make all special education instructional paraeducators meet the "highly qualified" requirements of the so-called No Child Left Behind law. Those requirements continue to apply only to Title I paras. nea

FOR MORE, go to www.nea.org/neatodayextra.



Daryl Gates has high hopes for the new IDEA. For one, it should shrink his piles of paperwork.

to make sure the new idea gets implemented. NEA is asking to have input into the design of the model form.

Encourage early intervention.

BEFORE: Some states and districts provided help for students before formal special education services kicked in, but others didn't. There was no federal funding for pre-special education intervention, Ralabate explains.

NOW: School districts can use up to 15 percent of their federal special education dollars for this purpose. "The new law will put teachers in a stronger position to get help when they want it," says Ralabate. "Schools are put on notice that they are supposed to intervene early and not wait until a student has fallen so far behind it's hard to catch up."

Teachers can ask psychologists, social workers, and special ed teachers to come into their classrooms, observe the students in question, and help them devise solutions—all without doing a full special education evaluation.

Create new criteria for getting special education help.

BEFORE: Students were identified as needing special ed services when their IQ scores were much higher than their performance on a standardized achievement test. The rationale: the student has the potential but something is holding him or her back.

NOW: The IQ-achievement test difference can still be used, but not as the sole criterion for IDEA eligibility. Teachers will have more flexibility to argue that a student is not learning the curriculum well enough and fast enough. Some students will get help who would not have been eligible under the old system, Ralabate says.

Improve 'highly qualified' rules.

BEFORE: The No Child Left Behind law implied that secondary school special education teachers had to be "highly qualified" in every subject they taught.

NOW: NEA was not successful in getting Congress to agree that a special education teacher who is certified in special education is highly qualified, period.

But the new law at least is better than the old situation. Special education teachers will have a number of ways to demonstrate their competence in academic subjects. Details can be found at www.nea.org/neatodayextra.

Provide stronger protection from violent students.

BEFORE: Any student could be removed from class for up to 10 days for dangerous conduct, but a student with a disability could then come back until a decision was made as to whether the conduct was caused by the disability. "In one case, two students, one disabled and one not, stabbed another student in class," Ralabate recalls. "The non-disabled student was immediately expelled. The disabled student was sent back to class pending a determination of whether the disability had caused the behavior. The teacher and the other kids were frightened to death, but it took several days to get that student out of the class."

NOW: An extremely violent student can be removed for up to 45 days while the IEP team figures out what to do next.

"There's only a small percentage of students who might cause physical harm in a class, but this change will definitely help teachers feel less helpless when dealing with them," says Mary Binegaer, an NEA special ed cadre member who teaches in Ohio.

Reduce litigation between parents and schools.

BEFORE: Disputes over the right program to help a child could have escalated quickly into the courts.

NOW: After a complaint is filed, school boards and parents or guardians will have a last-chance, face-to-face meeting before the case goes to court. Both sides must present their positions at this point. They generally can't bring up new areas of conflict later on if they do wind up in court.

PHOTOS: GREG PEARSON; PAPER STACK PHOTO: DIGITALVISION

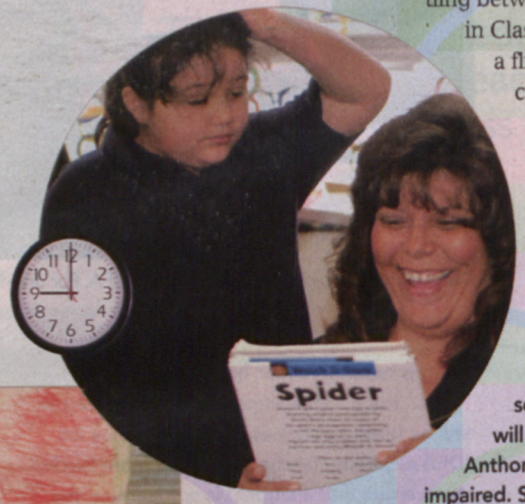
'She's My Mental Health'

A school day for a paraeducator is full of twists, turns, hard work and, yes, some wacky moments. Just ask Santa Fe para Barbara Salazar, a powerhouse of a helping hand to a very grateful teacher.

BY DAVE WINANS

"I COULDN'T GET THROUGH my reading groups without Barbara. She keeps the kids focused and under control."

—SECOND-GRADE TEACHER MARY BEACHAM



It's still early—and chilly—this Santa Fe morning, and classes at Gonzales Elementary won't begin for another hour. But instructional assistant Barbara Salazar is already shuttling between the school office and her computer in Classroom 110 to knock out the Daily Bull, a flier with the day's announcements. It cuts down on annoying intercom messages, and even offers a daily joke. Today's gem: "What is a polygon? Answer: A dead parrot."

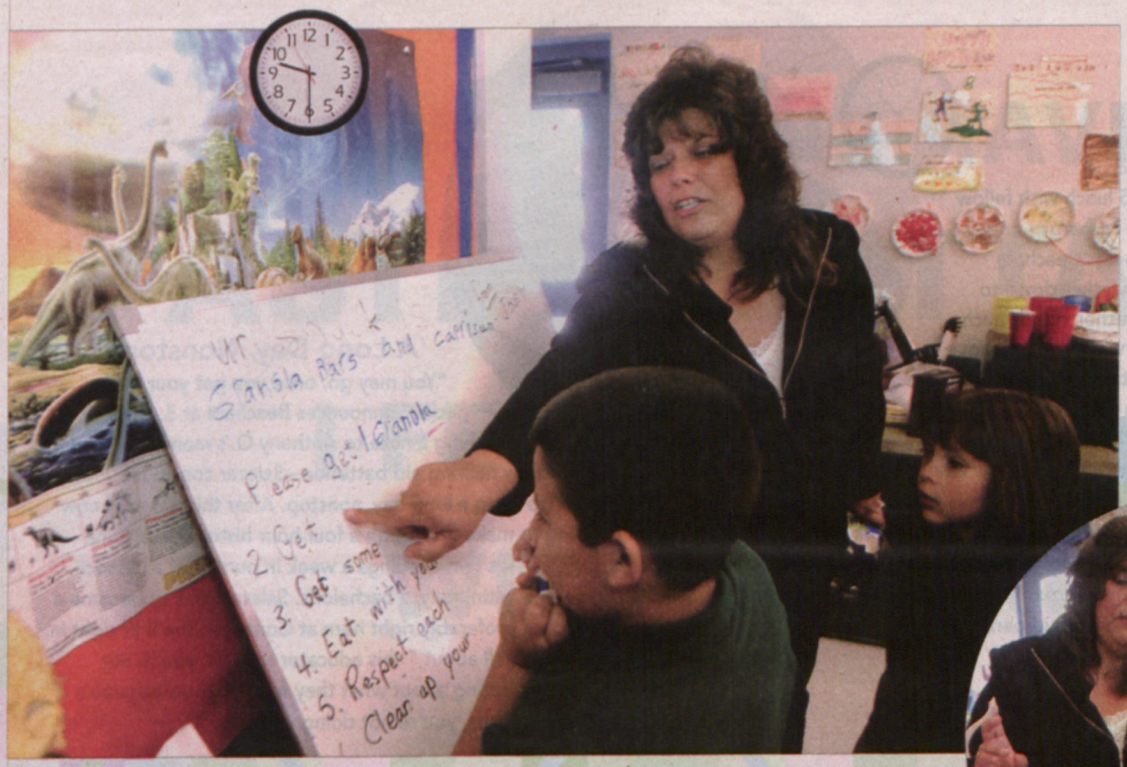
A Tough Little Audience

When the day begins in Classroom 110, every one of teacher Mary Beacham's second graders—14 of 16 are in today—will be able to savor the parrot joke, even Anthony M. and Anthony Q., who are hearing impaired. Salazar, skilled in working with the deaf and hearing impaired, fits the guys with their FM hearing aids, while Beacham, her daylong classroom partner, clips on two microphones and two transmitters—one for each Anthony. Beacham releases the parrot line and it flies into a wall. "They never laugh—a tough sell," says Salazar with a wince. Worse yet, the kids start rolling out their own jokes.

Focus, Please

But Salazar always "laughs at my jokes, whether they're funny or not," chuckles Beacham, a 28-year veteran. "She's my mental health; we feed off each other." It's a strong partnership, made essential by Santa Fe's intensive focus on literacy instruction. "I give instruction while Barbara focuses on the needs of kids at individual tables," Beacham explains. "I couldn't get through my reading groups without her. She keeps the kids focused and under control." Salazar says her role is to "work alongside the teacher's philosophy," but her colleague quickly adds, "Barbara never waits for me to ask—she anticipates."

PHOTOS: JEFF GEISSLER



Keeping It on the Rails

From 8 until the 10:15 break, students embark on the day's packed agenda of journal writing, reading, phonics, spelling, and math. Kids cluster in smaller and larger groups at tables, on the floor, or on comfy pillows in the corner. A focal point of learning activity: the semicircular reading table, where Beacham, center stage like a casino dealer, reads folktales with groups of five. Salazar, a seasoned 17-year vet, helps keep it all on the rails. Almost simultaneously she's helping Anthony M. and Anthony Q. count lost teeth (a math exercise) and helping other kids with phonics ("We find a Pot; we plant a Lot") or spelling ("What two words rhyme here?"), while prodding yet others to complete their word search diagrams.

A Knowing Neighbor

Salazar, who has sent two of her own kids through Gonzales Elementary, is clearly on home turf. She deftly mixes the nudging—"What are you working on?"... "What word is that?... "It's not too hard; you can do it"—with the knowing of a next-door neighbor. "I saw his brother at Albertson's supermarket last night," this bilingual aide softly tells two boys in a mix of Spanish and English. But impressively, for a school that's 68 percent Hispanic, English is the lingua franca of Classroom 110. In this easygoing environment, "kids help each other out, and bilingual kids pick up new English skills," Salazar explains. "They're bombarded constantly with conversation in English."

Cleanin' Up and All That

Salazar says her classroom's non-traditional, but she still tackles very traditional tasks, such as copying, wiping tables, straightening up the classroom, and writing notes to parents. At 11:05, while one group is at Beacham's reading table, Salazar is setting up snacks of juice and crackers for another group of six. "Is anybody allergic to anything?" she asks. And just before lunch, with a whistle around her neck, Salazar pulls playground duty, for an extra $7 a day. "Put that stick down!" she yells at kids hunting for a skunk by a fence. The playground may look like a vast expanse of dirt, but underneath lie historic Pueblo Indian ruins, and across the back fence is the mayor's home. In this place, children are as protected as the ruins.

BACKGROUND IMAGE: DIGITALVISION

Collecting the Data

Following her 12:45–1:15 lunch with fellow paras Carol Zamora, Lisa Frybarger, and Brenda Devine, Salazar helps Beacham walk the kids—quietly, quietly—down to the nurse's office. The teacher stands each child against a wall ruler while her colleague records the 3-foot heights. It's raw data, of course, for a future math exercise—just like missing teeth. At 2:05, it's back to Classroom 110 for a video dose of Bill Nye the Science Guy. While most kids are watching an episode on "The Epidermis," Salazar is back to her routine, helping some students with spelling book problems and others with paper-folding for tonight's assignment, in which they'll illustrate eight new spelling words. The kids are "so good at coming up to ask for help," says the proud para.

'A Long Day, Nonstop'

"You may go, once you get your backpacks," announces Beacham at 3. After writing a note to Anthony Q.'s mom—he needs new hearing aid batteries—Salazar concludes with a gasp: "It's been a long day, nonstop. After this, I don't know how I'm going to make it through a four-hour history class." She takes college classes two evenings a week in pursuit of an associate's degree and, ultimately, a bachelor's. Salazar aims to become a certified teacher, preferably right here at Gonzales. She'll fit right in. "Kids are what it's all about," this educator says. "If you're not listening to them, caring about what they feel, or knowledgeable about individual needs, you're not doing your job."

PHOTOS: JEFF GEISSLER; BACKGROUND IMAGE: DIGITALVISION

"WHEN I HAVE AN ASTHMA ATTACK I FEEL LIKE A FISH WITH NO WATER."

–JESSE, AGE 5

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No *Laughing* Matter

Folk singer and activist Peter Yarrow talks about how music can change the world—one classroom at a time.

JUST THE FACTS

More than 3 million students are victims of bullying each year, according to the American Medical Association.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) students are at greater risk—83 percent of GLBT students have been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, while more than 40 percent have been physically harassed, according to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

Bullying leaves long-term effects. Both bullies and victims are more likely to drop out of school and engage in criminal activity later in life, according to the National Association of School Psychologists.

It's the slice of school life that disheartens: Between 15 and 30 percent of students have either bullied a classmate or been bullied. And roughly 160,000 children stay home from school each day because they fear what a classmate might do to them.

Legendary folk musician Peter Yarrow finds such statistics simply unacceptable. In 2000 Yarrow, a member of the acclaimed music trio Peter, Paul & Mary, founded the nonprofit organization Operation Respect to equip educators with the tools and skills they need to transform their schools into compassionate, safe, and respectful places. Through the use of music, video, and interactive classroom activities, Operation Respect's "Don't Laugh At Me" program strives to sensitize children to the painful effects caused by ridicule, disrespect, and other forms of bullying and transform classrooms into "Ridicule-Free Zones." *NEA Today's* Kristen Loschert spoke with Yarrow about the mission behind "Don't Laugh At Me" and how his work with Operation Respect builds on his years of social activism.

Why did you start Operation Respect?

YARROW: It was simply an extension of the work that I've been doing throughout the years with Peter, Paul & Mary. Everything comes back to the absence or presence of respect. The civil rights movement was about racism, which is a very virulent form of disrespect. The women's movement and the gender equality movement are certainly about the absence or presence of respect. The environmental movement is about respect for the environment and for the next generation. War is about the kind of antipathy, animosity that proceeds from disrespect.

And so the dilemma with working on all those issues for the adult population is that you don't change the hearts of adults. You may change the civil rights law, you may change some societal norms, but it's merely two steps forward, one step back—unless you get to the hearts of children who can be reached prior to re-perpetuating that terrible cycle of disrespect, hatred, and prejudice that are just so prevalent in the world. The only way to really break that cycle is through the children. "Don't Laugh At Me" and Operation Respect focus on doing precisely that. I'm talking about creating an environment in which the next generation will grow up to act differently and look at each other differently.

Music plays a central role in your program. Why is music an effective way to connect with children and to change people's attitudes generally?

YARROW: The reality is that you remember songs, from when you dated, when you marched—they seep into your soul. Music allows people to receive messages that they might otherwise discard. They touch the heart.

The songs on the "Don't Laugh At Me" video produce very strong responses in the kids, and it provides a platform for a discussion of the issues, while the classroom exercises give them a sense that they are controlling their own environment. It's all about empowerment. The kids are our partners. If they are given a task of creating a ridicule-free environment in their classrooms, they will leap to the opportunity.

Now, that having been said, we are, of course, paddling upstream here because the majority of messages we're getting from the media are ones that seem to celebrate disrespect. You get famous for getting on *Jenny Jones* or *Jerry Springer* and humiliating somebody else or allowing yourself to be humiliated. I mean, it is a horrible cycle in the United States of people seeing this kind of behavior on television. The adults are amused and kids are troubled by it, yet they incorporate those role models into their own behavior patterns and hurt each other terribly.

How much did your mother's work as a teacher influence your sense of activism and decision to start the "Don't Laugh At Me" program? Were her philosophies at the back of your mind at all?

YARROW: That was in the front of my mind. My mother was a member of the teachers union, which could have lost her her job then. That's why I went into this field, this folk music. It was always teaching to me. The only way you achieve peace is through education. The only hope we have to turn back from this road is to interrupt the cycle of disrespect and hatred and prejudice on a racial, religious, national, tribal level, and the only way we can do that is through our ability to reach the children. And therein lies the reason for my saying this is the most important work I've ever done, which it is.

What are your future plans for "Don't Laugh At Me"?

YARROW: The program is just one piece of the puzzle. There's no pretense that this is a be-all and end-all program. This is just a tool. But

Peter Yarrow has presented the "Don't Laugh At Me Program" at more than 400 conferences and schools such as Patterson Elementary School in Colorado.

Get Involved

Has bullying become a problem in your school? Do you want to do something about it? Then join NEA's National Bullying Awareness Campaign. Through the campaign, NEA local affiliates partner with their school districts to develop a comprehensive bullying and sexual harassment prevention/intervention program. But they don't do it alone. Members of NEA's national cadre of trainers will work with local educators and staff to identify their school's individual problems and develop a program to address them. Want more information? Contact your state Association or visit www.nea.org/schoolsafety/bullying.html. Teachers' guides on bullying and sexual harassment also are available from the NEA Professional Library at http://home.nea.org/books, while parent resources are available from the NEA Health Information Network at www.neahin.org/canwetalk/.

it's a tool that has unique elements in it. It has the music, it has the appeal of the idealism of the songs. It's a program that has different concepts, like the ridicule-free zone, that are unique. And it has the support of magic dragons.

But the other part of us is to create the awareness of the problem and the solution. And bring it to the legislative arenas and bring it to the parents and bring it to the business community. Our role is to inform, to generate excitement, to generate energy, to mobilize, and also to provide one tool that can be an effective part of either launching people, launching classrooms, in this work or enriching similar work already in progress.

Our hope is that we will create this on a community-wide basis in a more integrated way, and more comprehensively, and reach the tipping point in the next year or two, whereby parents prefer to send their kids to schools that look most intensely at the culture of the school and the way it nurtures their kids before they look at the academics.

But shouldn't students' academic success be the priority?

YARROW: If the culture of the school is positive and loving, you can be sure that the academics will be equally successful. They do not function independently of each other. A school that is troubled will not be able to function in terms of allowing the kids to reach their academic potential. A school that is focused on the emotional development of the kids, the humanity of the language, the way in which they interact with each other and the teachers, and the way in which the teachers are allowed to teach will ultimately produce the best academic results as well. nea

To learn more about the "Don't Laugh At Me" program or to download a free copy of the curriculum, visit www.dontlaugh.org/. Educators can reproduce the program materials free of charge or purchase bulk quantities for a nominal fee.

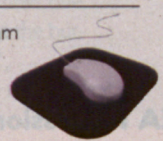
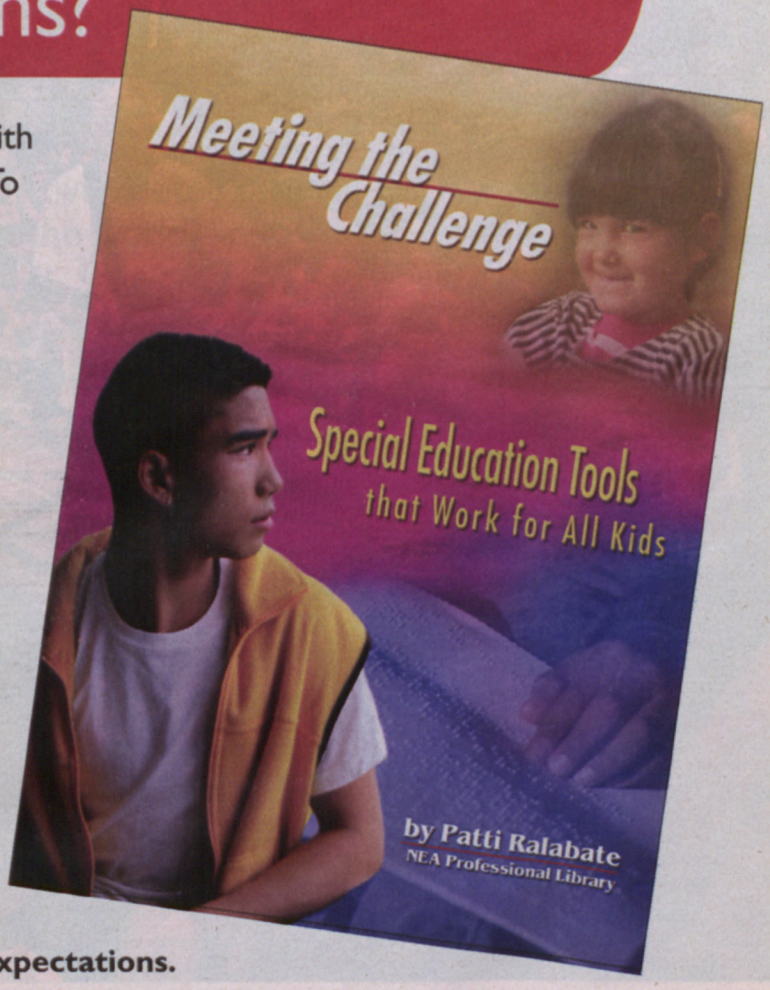


PHOTO: OPERATION RESPECT

Are you "meeting the challenges" of today's classrooms?



Classrooms today are full of students with various skill levels and special needs. To be an effective teacher, you need effective strategies to help students struggling to overcome academic or behavioral difficulties. *Meeting the Challenge: Special Education Tools that Work for All Kids* provides specialized resources designed to help you meet the individual needs of any student. This valuable toolkit addresses six critical areas:

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- ✓ **Providing accommodations and modifications.**
- ✓ **Communicating effectively with parents.**

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Battle Cry: Ante Up!

Grassroots lobbying targets Mississippi legislators. The goal: adequate funds for public schools.

After 20 years in the classroom, Mimi Gray is a pro at convincing kids to do their work—but state legislators have a few lessons to learn too, she says, particularly when it comes to funding public education.

Along with thousands of her colleagues, Gray, a math teacher at Coahoma County High School in the Mississippi Delta, has been preparing for a new after-school job—as an informal, unpaid lobbyist for education.

"Around here, everybody wants education," Gray says. "If we can put pressure on [our legislators], I know they'll support us."

With Mississippi schools facing a record $226.6 million deficit this year—which means "losing teachers and losing programs" in tiny Coahoma—it's become more critical than ever that Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE) members like Gray raise their voices.

So, MAE is leading a statewide effort to train nearly 100,000 teachers, parents, school board members, and administrators, plus business leaders and clergy, to speak up.

The initiative began last year with a series of passionate phone calls from MAE President Beverly Brahan to her friends at the state associations for superintendents, school boards, and administrators. All shared the same goal and the same frustration: We want great public schools, but we can't get the necessary state money to support them.

Math teacher and amateur lobbyist **Mimi Gray** helps Mississippi citizens put pressure on legislators to support public schools.

Months later, they came up with an answer—the Coalition for Children and Public Education (CCPE)—a cadre of citizens armed with letter-writing and lobbying skills, and the sheer will to knock on the doors of state senators and representatives and demand adequate funding.

"I've been kicking around Mississippi politics for a long time and I don't think I've seen a time when things are so grave," CCPE co-chair former Governor William Winter told dozens of the coalition's new recruits at Brookhaven High School last fall.

"We are going to slip back unless there's a concentrated effort by the people in this state to insist the adequate education program be fully funded," warned Winter.

The shortfall faced by Mississippi schools isn't unique; many public educators have become accustomed to writing letters and calling for help. But MAE believes its new effort can be more effective than ever because it relies on community-wide support. And it provides regular folks with the necessary tools to do good lobbying.

"Individually, you really don't know what to do—but this gives you something to do," Gray says. And, like Winter, Gray is confident legislators will respond to citizens, if they hear from enough of them.

The Mississippi coalition kicked off its efforts in early September with training sessions in Jackson and Brookhaven, and then followed them up with more than a half-dozen meetings across the state. From every district in the state, six-person teams that included all of the affected groups—teachers and parents and business people—attended the sessions.

MAE and the coalition's other leaders asked each of those six people to reach out to 10 more friends—but not the usual suspects who regularly fire off letters to the editor. Then those 10 were asked to involve 10 more. That adds up to 90,000 foot-soldiers for Mississippi schools.

The coalition supplied them with sample letters, facts and figures about the looming deficit in each school district, and more than a little advice on getting the job done:

MAKE IT LOCAL. "The way to motivate a community is to talk about how this will affect my school or my children's school, and my community's businesses," Brahan advises.

START EARLY. Mississippi's legislative session kicked off in January, but Brahan asked every team member to contact at least two legislators by December. It's best to shake hands in person, says Frank Yates, MAE's executive director. "It's nice to send them a letter, but it's better to get to know them."

BE STRATEGIC. Begin your conversation by thanking them for their previous support, Yates suggests. Then let them know you're worried and point out a specific consequence of poor funding. Are your school buses getting old and unsafe? Will your aide lose her job? Ask administrators to help you identify potential consequences.

DELIVER A CONSISTENT, POSITIVE MESSAGE. In Mississippi, for example, public schools have made historic progress and have proven accountable. Tell them people are not asking for luxury; they just want fair funding.

DON'T LET THEM GET TO YOU. When a legislator argues, "Do you want us to raise taxes? Kick kids out of wheelchairs?" remember it's not your job to find the money. "We can tell them it's a matter of priorities and we want education to be number one," Brahan advises. "Put the burden back on them."

—MARY ELLEN FLANNERY

PHOTO: BILL JOHNSON

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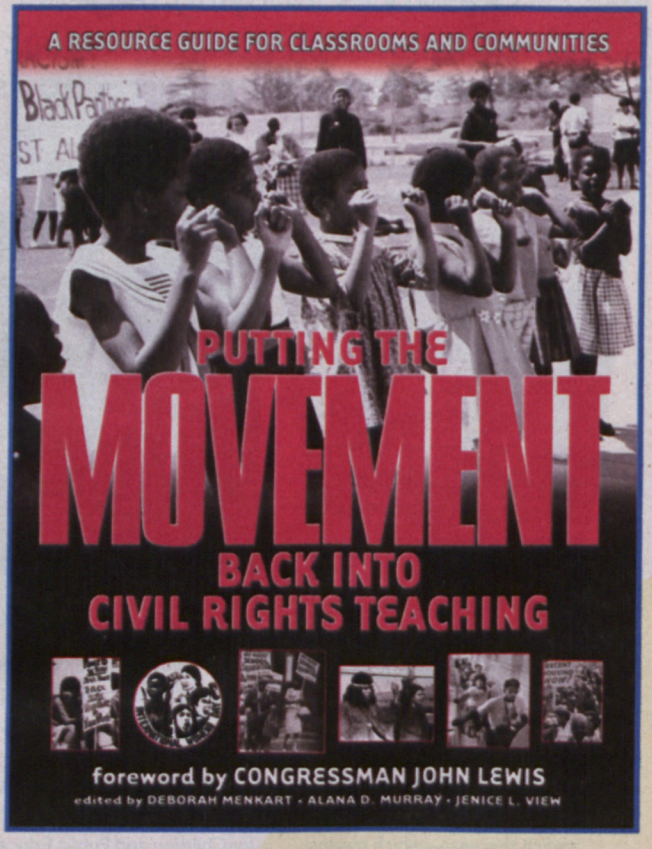
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'We're Worth It!'

Living wage crusader Debbie Minnick tells ESPs how to organize for a decent raise.

Debbie Minnick, a Title I paraprofessional and the president of Education Support Professionals of Ithaca (New York), was recently honored by the National Committee on Pay Equity for leading a successful "living wage" battle in 2001–02 for 220 underpaid paras. That campaign yielded a three-year contract that raised the starting para wage by 50 percent. Now Minnick, a member of the NEA Board of Directors, regularly travels across the country to talk up living wage strategies with ESP leaders and Association staff. What insight does she share? *NEA Today*'s Dave Winans has a chat.

Just what is a living wage?

MINNICK: It's the minimum hourly wage a person can live on with basic dignity without struggling, without having to go to friends, relatives, the government, or the community for assistance.

Why is the living wage such a hot issue?

MINNICK: Sometimes people look at paraeducators and other ESPs and say, "Those people are moms who like to work in the schools because they've got kids there and it's a little extra pocket money; it doesn't matter what they make." This is not 1965. Health insurance alone doesn't put the groceries on our tables. We all have different jobs in the education field, and I don't put one on a higher or lower rung than another. I mean, who is it that decided that an administrator makes 12 times more than a food service person?

When she isn't in her classroom, **Debbie Minnick** travels with tactics.

Are wages the top concern of ESPs?

MINNICK: I think they are, but what goes along with that is the whole issue of dignity and respect, and that's directly related to the salaries that ESPs make.

When you're on the road, what's your key message to support professionals?

MINNICK: Think and bargain differently than the way you usually do. We allow school board negotiators to tell us, "There's not enough money. You're not going to get more than your usual 3 percent." You just have to stop thinking like them. It almost works better if you just get mad about your situation and say: "I'm not taking this anymore. We're doing things differently. I'm worth it; I'm worth a lot more than what I'm getting."

Doesn't this approach involve confrontation?

MINNICK: A living wage campaign involves information you have gathered on how much more money you need to survive with basic human dignity. You can tone it down as much as you want; it doesn't have to be in-your-face bargaining. And this works in both bargaining and non-bargaining states. In one way or another, you're still negotiating, whether it's with administrators or legislators.

How do you get started?

MINNICK: You start this project with a small core group in your NEA local affiliate and start to research a living wage in your area. But remember, you're not going to pull this off with a small dedicated group alone. You need to educate your membership about what this is all about, how you're going to need everybody's help.

Where do you turn for that help?

MINNICK: Make community contacts. Parents are key. Work with community organizations—the religious community is usually a big backer of the living wage in general. And remember, we have brothers and sisters in the labor movement who are willing to help us. Build all those outside partnerships and relationships ahead of time. Then when you need them, you're able to call on them. And keep those relationships alive, because your allies will want to be able to use your backing as well. It's a circle that keeps going!

Aside from a better raise, what's the payoff of a successful living wage campaign?

MINNICK: You become a group of employees that no school district can ignore. You're a force to be reckoned with, you have the community's backing, and your members get really active, involved, and excited in the union—and stay that way.

For more, contact Debbie Minnick at Debbieipa@aol.com. For more on wage strategies and NEA living wage grants to local affiliates, contact Bargaining Specialist Jorge Rivera at Jrivera@nea.org.

More ESP stories in this issue:

- **Michigan ESPs, teachers working without contracts – *Page 19***
- **Drivers share tips on managing student behavior – *Page 32***
- **A glimpse into a typical day for a powerhouse para – *Page 36***

PHOTOS: JON REIS

Should tracking be abolished?

YES

As a former tracked high school student, I am against tracking. I was a "brain" in high school, always in the honors classes getting good grades. However, I feel that tracking unnecessarily classifies, labels, and segregates students.

In my high school, many students felt that being in the high track meant they were better than others. In one incident I recall, two other "brains" and I ended up in a mixed-ability study hall class. On our first day, one of the "brains" said to me, "I'm not staying in here with them."

By the second day of study hall, she'd become a language lab assistant and the other "brain" had become a guidance assistant. I was the only one who chose to stay.

The remaining students and I quickly became friends. We saw that, despite our different academic levels, we had a lot in common. One student even told me that she never liked me before because I was "too smart."

The most disturbing part of this experience was that one "low track" student wrote in my yearbook, "You're the first smart person I have talked to." How sad. Tracking made him feel that way. Absolutely no one should feel so low about himself or his environment that he'd say he's never spoken to a smart person before.

As a 14-year elementary teacher, I have a mixed-ability class and I differentiate my lessons for different abilities.

In many classes, if not all, clear requirements and expectations can be given to the students telling them what is necessary to achieve an A, a B, etc. The "brains" will continue to reach for the A's and maybe some of the slower learners will attempt them too. Maybe they will work with and be inspired by the faster learners to set higher goals. I have seen this happen firsthand.

I believe that students, when they are together in a mixed-ability group, will develop more tolerance of one another, and possibly a new attitude toward learning.

JANICE WILSON teaches second grade in Woodbridge Township, New Jersey.

NO

I teach at a Blue Ribbon school of excellence, highly respected for the number of college-bound student graduates. We use tracking in some academic areas to best meet student needs. We offer a basic level, a college-bound level, an accelerated level, an honors level, and in some areas, AP classes.

Our school recognizes each student's unique learning style and pace, and affords students the opportunity to be at the head of their class.

Some students function at many different levels. They may be accelerated in mathematics but have a more difficult time with English. Ability grouping allows them to find the best academic fit.

No one is locked into a level and students are constantly evaluated and moved into levels that will meet their need to excel.

High school students are highly competitive individuals who become frustrated and disappointed quickly when they do poorly. They want to be at the top. They want to be respected in their classrooms both socially and because of their academic standing.

It is difficult for a student with low reading ability to keep pace in a class of students who read faster and better. The slower student becomes embarrassed. This student will often become a discipline problem by acting out those feelings of shame and low self-esteem.

In non-ability grouped classes, the same students always seem to be answering the questions and getting the A's. In ability grouped classes, students have more opportunities to answer questions in discussion sessions, ask questions that others won't think are weak, and find validation as class leaders.

At our school, each student knows that with hard work, he or she has the opportunity to be at the head of the class.

I say, give every student a chance to rise to the top, and you will see someone smile at the end of a day because they have felt success.

JOYCE DAVIS teaches high school English in Glendale, Wisconsin.

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

Should tracking be abolished?
To vote, visit our Web site at www.nea.org/neatoday and see the results instantly.

Should students have to take drug tests to participate in extracurricular activities?
The tally on this *NEA Today* Debate question:
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Does social promotion flunk kids?
If you'd like to take part in this future Debate, send a brief note to Alain Jehlen, ajehlen@nea.org.

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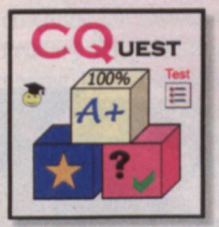

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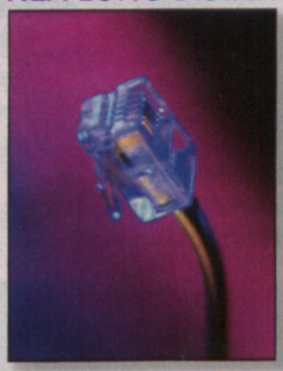

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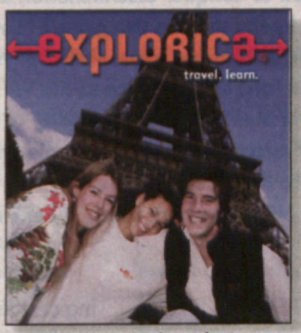

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You Gotta Have Heart

"Dance in the body you have!"

—AGNES DE MILLE, DANCER, AUTHOR

BY SHEREE CRUTE

This Valentine's Day we're celebrating the love and dedication of teachers who've overcome serious illnesses or physical disabilities to teach—and inspire—children of all ages. Their acts of bravery are not the ticker-tape parade moments that make the evening news, but the everyday achievements of regular folks who've managed to turn life-transforming health challenges into opportunities to live passionately and succeed brilliantly.

These heroes have had to conquer discrimination and debilitating physical problems. What keeps them in the game? "Lots of motivation and inner resources, combined with great social skills," says Michael Dunn, a psychologist for the spinal cord injury service at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System in California. Kevin Stein, director of quality of life research for the American Cancer Society concurs, "It's part of human nature to resist tough problems and find ways to live a fulfilling life."

That's a lesson these NEA members teach, by example, each day.

DONNA DILLOW

CHRISTY CRAIG

"My students call me an undercover agent," says middle school English and language arts teacher Christy Craig. Craig—who is blind—drives her seventh and eighth graders crazy with her uncanny ability to detect their rowdy antics.

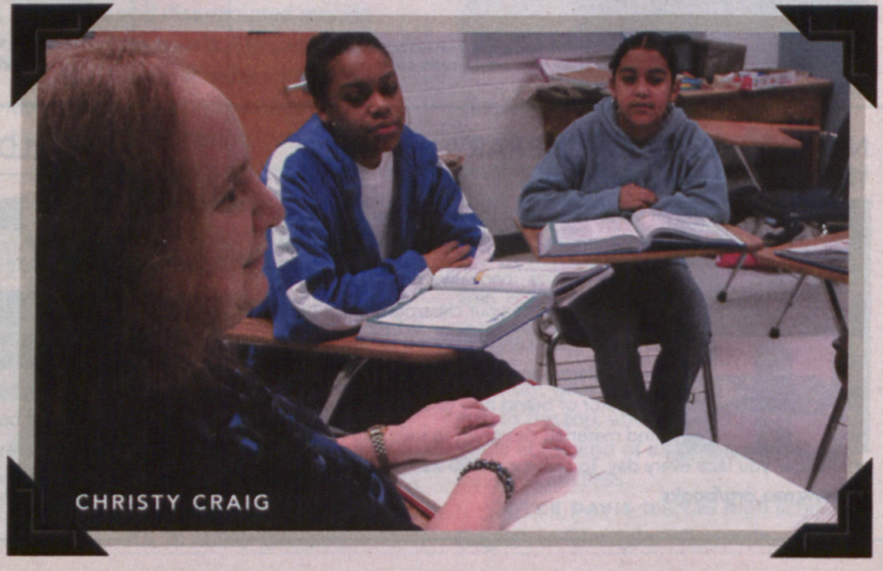
At age 2, Craig, now 50, lost her sight to retinal cancer, but she never considered letting blindness stand in the way of her dream of becoming a teacher. "My dad would send me off to school with my [sighted] sister and not tell anyone I was blind," says Craig. "By the time they figured it out, I was in class. They'd call him and complain and he'd say, 'is she failing or causing trouble? No? Then don't call me back unless she does,'" Craig recalls.

Armed with a 40-pound portable typewriter (dad taught her to type), student volunteers who read to her in each class (no Braille texts were available then in public schools), and a powerful memory, Craig graduated high school, earned a B.A. in English—along with teaching degrees in French, English, Spanish, and German—and an M.A. in education administration.

Craig's degrees, however, were no deterrent to discrimination. "My own university, Texas State, gave me a teaching certificate but would not give me a teaching assistant's position," she says. "They told me, 'blind people can't teach.'"

Today Craig teaches at Graham Park Elementary School in Virginia. "I have a teaching assistant, but the discipline, teaching, grading, and rules are mine," says Craig, who uses voice recognition computer software, her amazing memory, and help from her husband who sometimes reads entire texts to her (schools don't provide Braille texts for teachers) to get work done.

At the end of the day, Craig leaves her students with more than a love of language. "I hope I show them that life isn't always fair but you really can succeed, no matter what."



CHRISTY CRAIG

PHOTO TOP: DAVID HUMBER; BOTTOM: SANDY SCHAEFFER

DONNA DILLOW

Most folks would do anything to stay out of a wheelchair, but for Donna Dillow, those wheels are wings. "I'm fiercely independent," says Dillow, an education assistant at Pigeon Forge Primary School in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Dillow, now 62, was just 18 months old when her spinal cord was injured, causing her legs to become weaker and weaker.

For nine years, Dillow used the crutches she'd used for mobility all her life to travel to three or four classrooms a day, tutoring third and fourth graders with learning disabilities. "But I finally swallowed my pride and got into this wheelchair so I could do my job better," Dillow admits.

A childhood marked by a school system that prevented disabled children from attending classes gave Dillow a special appreciation for education. "My parents had to fight to get me into Florida public schools by the fourth grade," says Dillow, who was home schooled before that. "I loved class, but school was also an escape from an unhappy life at home after I lost my mother on Christmas day the year I turned 13."

Dillow's positive school experiences helped guide her choice of careers as an adult. "I love encouraging young people and teaching them not to say, 'I can't,'" says Dillow, who also does volunteer work, is studying algebra and geometry for an upcoming teacher assistant's test, and now spends her free time learning to bowl from her wheelchair.

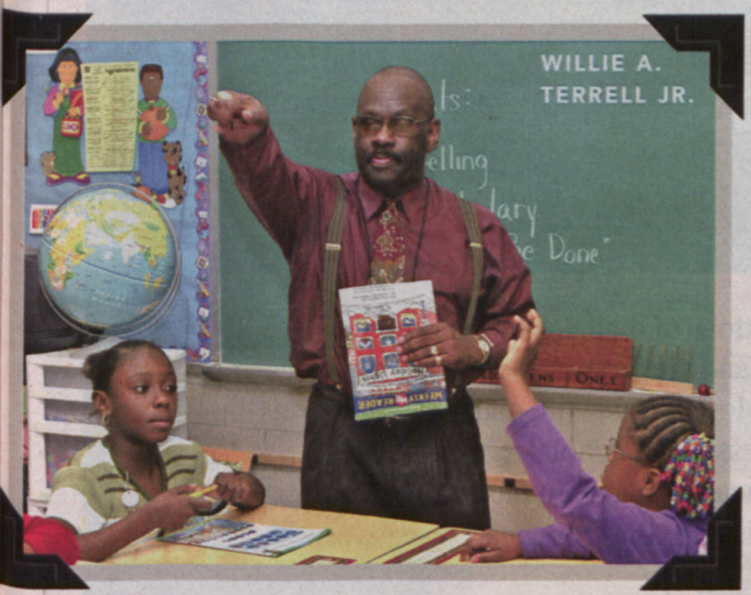
"Sometimes I get frustrated, but I prefer working through disadvantages," admits Dillow. "My greater concern is the kids. Making sure I'm getting through to a child is what really matters."

WILLIE A. TERRELL JR.

"Once a teacher, always a teacher," says Willie A. Terrell Jr., though the lessons he offers others today reach far beyond the classroom. Terrell, currently president of the Dayton Ohio Education Association (DEA) was in his 40s when he learned he had colon cancer.

While gearing up for a new school year at Kiser Middle School in Dayton, Ohio, Terrell got a surprise call after what he thought was a routine physical.

"As it happened, I didn't make the first day of class that year," he recalls. "Tests showed that I had early stage colon cancer and required surgery and chemotherapy right away." Already a vice president of DEA and carrying a full teaching load, Terrell was determined to get back to work as soon as possible.



It was a struggle but Terrell had plenty of support. "My students were so compassionate," Terrell recalls. "I was very tired and couldn't stand or get around the classroom easily, so they pitched right in." The students ran class-related errands for him, passed out their own papers, and shared stories about family members and friends who'd had cancer.

"I saw my illness as a chance to teach my students how to help and talk to someone who was ill," Terrell says. These days Terrell is spreading the word about the importance of early detection to friends and educators.

"Cancer was tough," he admits, "but just believing in a higher power strengthened and reassured me. By the grace of God, I made it through."

Ask the Experts

Q: We've been married for 18 years and my husband and I still exchange little gifts—flowers for me, candy for him—on Valentine's Day. But this year, we need something dramatically different. We're struggling with elder care, family illness, and other stresses that are leaving us both depressed and driving us apart. Could a little Valentine's day pampering help?

Lena Callahan
ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

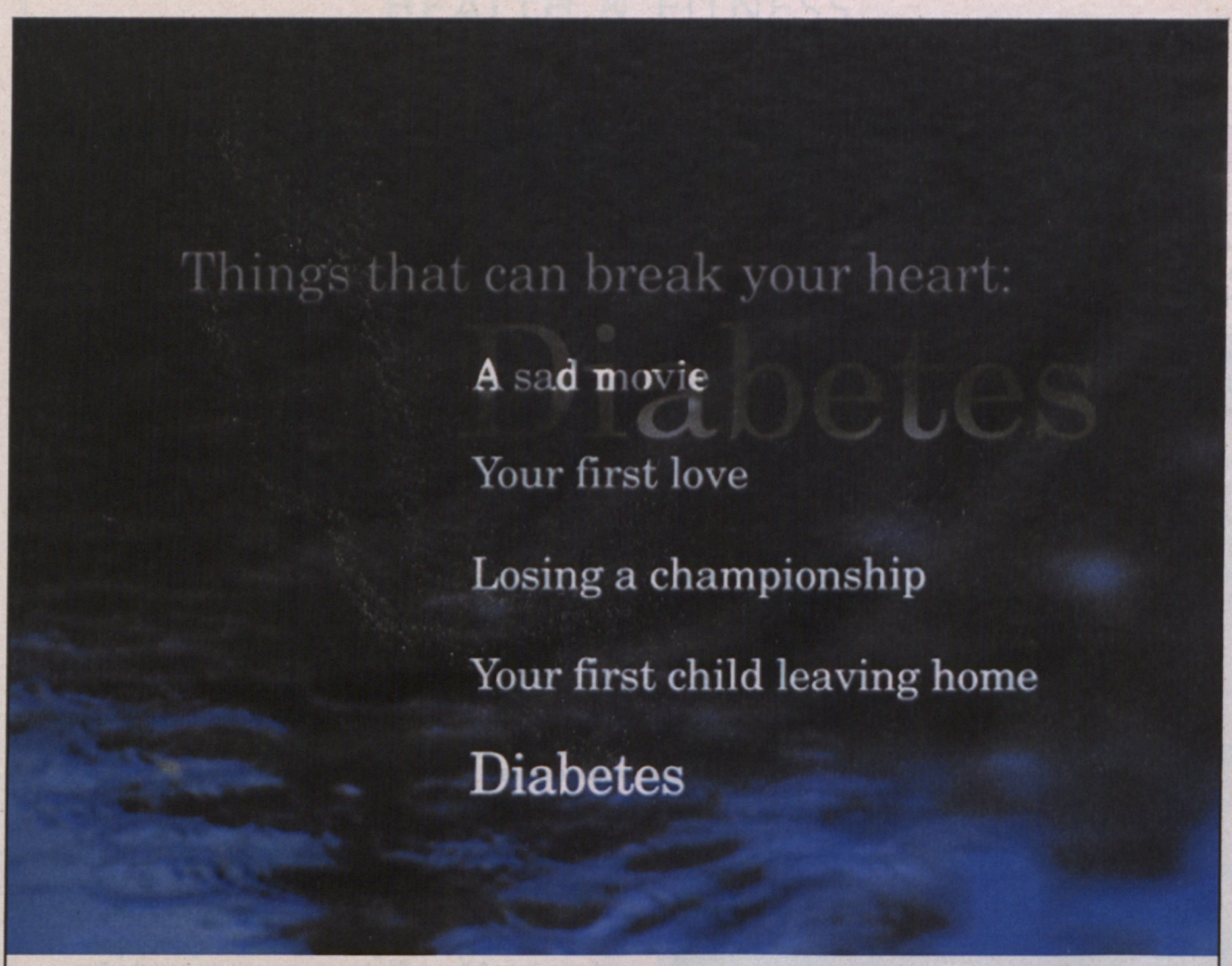
A: A little pampering always goes a long way to relieve stress. But the best gifts, our experts say, are the ones that will keep on giving to you and your hubby, all year long.

1. TO BEGIN WITH, says relationship expert Cat Burton, thin out the crowd. Make a monthly or bi-monthly date without kids, family, or other obligations and have some fun together. "Shared good times will help you grow and stay together," Burton says. It doesn't matter what you pick—opera or a silly movie—just be sure to keep that date, no matter what else is going on at home.

2. LISTEN TO YOUR LOVE. Especially in times of stress, couples stop really hearing each other, Burton advises. But an open ear can do more for your partner than pounds of chocolate. "Make a conscious effort—pretend you just met, be present, look into your partner's eyes. Really being there will bring back the romance," promises Richard Carlson, author of the best-selling *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff* series, and the upcoming book, *Easier Than You Think.*

3. "AND SHAKE THINGS UP," Carlson advises. Create a new tradition. For pampering, "try a couples spa trip or just get a massage together," says Burton. "For fun, go horseback riding, take a fishing trip, or just take long walks in the woods." The point: find some new ways to reconnect and enjoy each other every day of the year.

PHOTO: JAN UNDERWOOD



The complications of diabetes often go undiagnosed, and are far more serious than you might think. Most people with diabetes also have high blood pressure and cholesterol, which can cause severe heart damage. In fact, 2 out of 3 people with diabetes die from heart disease or stroke.

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Silly Paperwork

What's the silliest paperwork you've had to fill out?

Answer: We had to fill out a form that asked how much paperwork we have and what it was used for.

BILLIE SPRADLEY
Eighth-grade English teacher
Anniston, Alabama

Answer: While I was off work for maternity leave 20 years ago, a worker's compensation representative arrived at my door and said I was eligible if I filled out the forms. I was answering the usual information until I read: "Explain, as accurately as possible, how and when this injury occurred." I answered, tongue in cheek, and was granted the compensation. My husband said I should have gone into great detail.

KAREN MANDEVILLE
Retired teacher, Clinton Township, Michigan

Bathroom Breaks

What do you do about a student who keeps asking to go to the restroom during class?

Answer: When a student has to go, a student has to go, but how do you know? At the beginning of the quarter, I give each student three bathroom passes. I collect unused passes for extra credit at the end of the quarter.

MICHAEL DONELSON
High school English teacher
Upper Arlington, Ohio

Answer: I keep a booklet for bathroom use and students sign and date it when they go. It has stopped habitual users because I can show it to parents.

TERRI O'DONNELL
San Pedro, California

Answer: I say, "No problem, just make up the time after class."

MICHAL REED
High school teacher
Porterville, California

Comparative Poetry

On our Colorado fourth-grade reading exam, the items missed most often are about poetry. We read and write poems, but for this test, students have to compare poems. Does anyone know of good teaching materials for that?

RITA CONLEY
Elementary school teacher
Arvada, Colorado

Answer: Find two poems similar in theme or structure. 1. Show them on the overhead. 2. Make two columns, "same" and "different." 3. Get students talking about the poems by pointing out how each poem falls on the page (typography). 4. How is the message conveyed: Is it subtle? Is it obvious? 5. Does this fit your idea of poetry? Does a good poem have to rhyme? 6. What is happening in this poem? Good Luck!

RACHEL DIMASSA
Secondary English and art teacher, South Lyon, Michigan

Master's Degree

I would like to get a master's degree, but I still have a student loan from obtaining my bachelor's. Are there grants or scholarships available to teachers like me? I really don't want to go further into debt.

JASON BURGAR
Seventh-grade science teacher, Springfield, Illinois

"The driver education teacher requests an exemption from the ban on prayer during school-sponsored activities."

Share your wisdom, ask your question!

What's the worst mistake you've found in a textbook?

Send your answers to these or other questions on this page to **ajehlen@nea.org.** Or, send us a question you'd like to see posted. Please include your name, your job, and the community and state where you work.

For a weekly e-mail of questions, answers, and practical classroom tips, join Works4Me, one of NEA's most popular and useful services. Just send the message "subscribe Works4Me" (without the quotation marks) to **Lyris@list.nea.org.**

ILLUSTRATION TOP: IMAGE SOURCE; PHOTO CENTER LEFT: ANDRE KUDYUSOV, PHOTOMONDO; PHOTO CENTER RIGHT: STOCKBYTE; ILLUSTRATION BOTTOM: PHOTODISC

Not Rattled By Snakes

Ask Matthew Wilson why he hunts for rattlesnakes and this fourth-grade social studies teacher at Port Allegany Elementary School in Pennsylvania, will give you his patented answer.

"AFTER 28 YEARS OF TEACHING FOURTH GRADERS, I may have some brain damage," he quips.

The truth is, Wilson, an amateur herpetologist, is fascinated by the timber rattlesnakes that hide in blueberry fields and under large rocks in North Central Pennsylvania. During the past nine years, Wilson and his wife, Paula, have caught more than 250 snakes. That includes 50 rattlers this season.

Since timber rattlesnakes are a protected species in Pennsylvania, the Wilsons don't actually "catch" the snakes. Instead, they use tongs to lift them off the ground. They note their locations, measure them, determine their sex, and then mark them on the underside before releasing them back into the wild. Their data are logged and sent to the state Fish and Boat Commission. "Our reports show what areas need to be protected," says Wilson, who wears long-sleeved shirts, knee-high Kevlar leggings, and snake-proof gloves and boots.

Despite the protective gear, a snake's fangs penetrated a seam in Wilson's glove in 2003, sending him into anaphylactic shock. A helicopter flew Wilson, who was allergic to the venom, to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, where doctors considered amputating his hand. Instead, Wilson got massive doses of anti-venom serum and was released 12 days later.

Wilson's fourth graders are impressed. "Some of them ask to go with me but I tell them they have to wait until they're older," Wilson says, adding that one day he'll retire and become a full-time herpetologist.

—CAROLYN WHITE

Remembering the *Titanic*

Charles Haas' lifelong fascination with a sinking ship has proved to be a treasure trove for this New Jersey high school teacher. Haas, who teaches English and journalism, has co-written five books on the subject. And he claims to be the first American teacher to dive to the ocean floor for a firsthand look at the historic wreck.

HAAS' FIRST BOOK, *Titanic: Triumph and Tragedy,* written with John P. Eaton, was published in 1986 and made the *London Times* bestseller list. Their second book, *Titanic: Destination Disaster,* was published in 1988. Three more books followed in the 1990s.

Haas' *Titanic* obsession began in childhood. "My grandfather worked for a stevedore company in New York City," says Haas. "I'd sit in his office and watch the big boats sailing on the river." When Haas was 12, his grandfather gave him a book on the *Titanic*. "I was hooked," Haas admits. "I wrote research papers on it in high school. In college, I spent my free time in the microfilm room reading old *Titanic* articles."

In 1993, Haas accepted an invitation from RMS Titanic, Inc., to view the wreck from a three-person submersible capable of diving 2.5 miles to the ocean floor. A robotic camera sent inside the wreckage let him see firsthand the sites he'd read and written about. In 1996, Haas made a second dive, this time as narrator for a Discovery Channel special.

Haas' students bring up the *Titanic* in the middle of class, trying to divert his attention. "But I'm wise to them," Haas adds. When he retires, Haas hopes to talk *Titanic* with students around the country. "It teaches us about math (calculating distances), history, sociology, and human behavior in times of stress," says Haas. "But most important, it teaches us not to place total faith in technology."

—DONNA CHIU

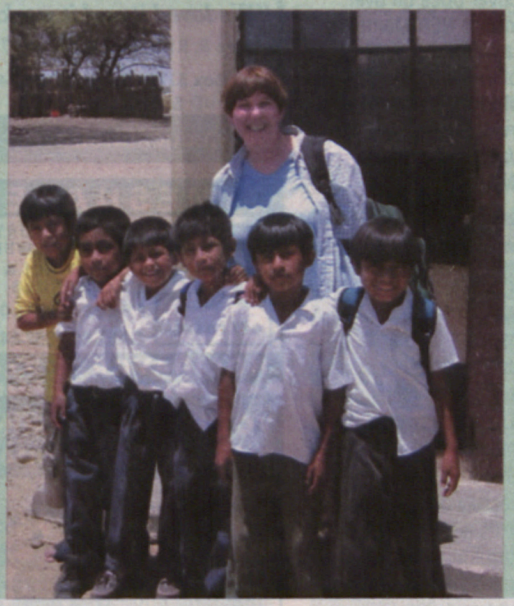
PHOTO TOP: JOE LIUZZO; BOTTOM: RMS TITANIC, INC.

The Book Fairy

Phyllis Hall's commitment to connecting children and books has earned this Salt Lake City librarian a lot of frequent flyer miles.

FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, Hall, a library/media specialist at West Jordan High in Utah, has paid her own way to Peru to distribute more than 8,000 books to children in some of the most remote, impoverished areas of this South American country. A volunteer for Salt Lake City's Eagle Condor Humanitarian Project, Hall explains, "When other volunteers told me the children of Peru valued books more than toys, I knew what I had to do."

Hall's collections include picture books, fiction, and biographies, as well as books on science, health, and history. Her libraries have revitalized a number of Peruvian schools. In Pata Cancha, a small village 14,000 feet above sea level, some students travel five hours a day—two hours downhill and three hours for their uphill return—just to attend a school with one of Hall's libraries.



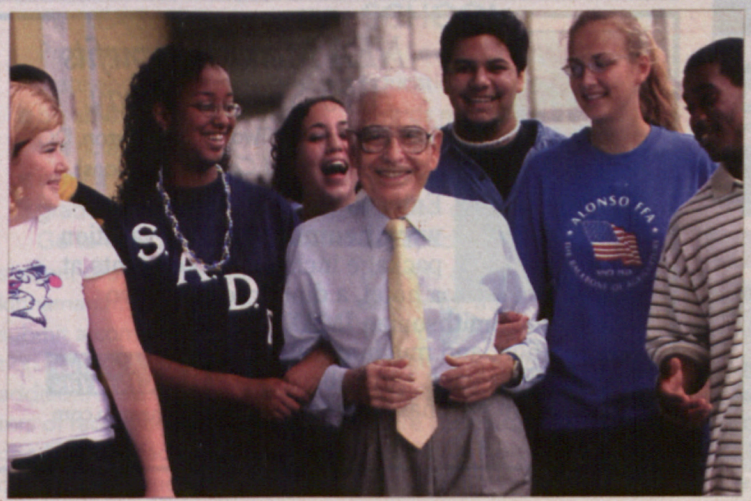
During another trip, Hall left 250 books in a principal's office. "When I returned two years later, I discovered they had built a special room for the books. Each class was allowed a half hour a day to read and study there," says Hall. Earlier this year, Hall visited Chiclayo, a city of one million, and discovered the 8,000-book public library had only eight books for children. So far, Hall has raised several thousand dollars to buy more books for Chiclayo's children.

Hall's work has also inspired West Jordan High's students. One young man, a member of a West Jordan student-led humanitarian group, asked Hall to be his mentor. "He's taking the books he collected to a school in Africa," Halls says with pride.

—CAROLYN WHITE

Giving His Name Back

Former NEA President Braulio Alonso has received many honors throughout his career as an educator, but he confesses to mixed feelings about one.



THE CITY OF TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA, named one of their new high schools after Alonso, a member of Florida Education Association-Retired. Even with all of his accomplishments, Alonso feels the honor may have come a tad too soon. "I'm certainly grateful for the honor," he says. "But I've always thought honors like those should be given to people after they have passed away!" To Alonso, accolades should never be the reason a person is trying to make a difference. "We have a responsibility to help out others, so that's why I still stay involved."

A staunch advocate for integration in schools and more opportunities for minority students, Alonso had his battles through the years with local school officials. But he has been able to see the fruits of his labor emerge at Alonso High.

"The school is very well-integrated," he says. "And what's really good is that more and more minority students are getting involved and receiving recognition for their achievements than before."

Still, Alonso shies away from the limelight. "The principal always invites me to the school, but I don't want to interfere," says Alonso, who tossed the coin at the school's first football game. "I'm very happy with what I see going on there. They're doing a great job."

—JOZEN CUMMINGS

GOT A TIP?

Do you have an interesting story idea? Contact Sabrina Holcomb, section editor, at **sholcomb@nea.org**

PHOTO TOP: BILL HALL; BOTTOM: CHERIE DIEZ

feb'05 MARKETPLACE

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resources

55 **NEA Grants** Get help with school improvement projects.
56 **On the Web** Library of Congress site looks in-depth at *Brown v. Board of Education.*
57 **Diversity Calendar** February boasts days to commemorate famous abolitionists.
57 **Books by NEA Members** Creating a better stage crew for your school perfomances.
59 **Take Note** A guide to dealing with legal issues surrounding students' sexual orientation.
60 **In Print** 100 years before *Brown v. Board of Education,* Blacks in Boston fought for equality.
60 **Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits** Assessing home ownership goals with these financing programs.
61 **What's Up at HIN** New video/CD-ROM package to promote indoor air quality in schools.
62 **On TV** PBS show helps young students improve reading skills.
62 **NEA's Read Across America** NFL players Tiki and Ronde Barber lead the way to March 2.

Attention Student Members

THE JACK KINNAMAN SCHOLARSHIP helps college students defray the cost of higher education. The scholarship was created in memory of NEA-Retired Vice President and former Advisory Council member, Jack Kinnaman. To be considered for the scholarship, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- be an active participant in the NEA Student Program on the local, state and/or national level
- be able to demonstrate financial need
- carry a 2.5 or better grade point average.

Go to www.nea.org/student-program/programs/kinnaman.html to print and submit a completed application by **April 15, 2005.** In addition, include two (2) letters of recommendation—one from the faculty advisor of your NEA Student Program chapter—the other from someone who is not a relative. For more, contact NEA-Retired at 202-822-7149.

SPRUCE UP YOUR SCHOOL

The Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation awards more than $2 million annually to diverse organizations across the United States through community and public school improvement projects and education scholarships for trade disciplines. The Foundation provides funding only to 501 (c)(3) organizations in communities where Lowe's operates stores and distribution centers. School improvement projects include: playground enhancements, landscaping and painting, and outdoor learning environments such as educational gardening programs. For more, go to www.lowes.com/lkn?action=pg&p=AboutLowes/Community#charitable.

CALLING CAPTAIN PLANET

The Captain Planet Foundation offers grants between $250 and $2,500 for environmental projects that:

- promote understanding of environmental issues
- focus on hands-on involvement
- involve children and young adults 6–18
- promote interaction and cooperation in the group
- help young people develop planning and problem solving skills
- include adult supervision
- commit to follow-up communication with the Foundation.

All applicant organizations or sponsoring agencies must be exempt from federal taxation under the Internal Revenue Code Section 501 to be eligible for funding. Deadlines for submitting grant applications are **March 31,** June 30, September 30, and December 31. Grant proposals are reviewed over a period of three months from the date of the submission deadline. Proposals must be submitted online. For more information, or to apply, go to www.captainplanetfdn.org/.

HELP FOR MUSIC PROGAMS

The Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation Melody Program provides musical instruments and instrument repairs to existing K–12 school music programs that have no other source of financing to purchase additional musical instruments and materials. Grant applications are accepted throughout the year for instruments and instrument repairs between $500 and $5,000. No cash awards are given. To be eligible, applicant schools must:

- have an ongoing music program that is at least three years old
- have a recruitment plan for its instrumental music program
- offer a well-balanced musical instruction pro-

PHOTO: PHOTODISC

gram with budgets or monies made available annually to cover the costs of additional expenses
- have adequate facilities for lessons, practice, rehearsals and secure storage of instruments.

In addition, all schools must offer one group or private lesson per week that stresses instruction on a student's instrument. Elementary schools must offer at least one rehearsal/class per week that reinforces the lesson; middle schools must offer at least two rehearsals/classes per week that reinforce the lesson; and high schools must offer three rehearsals/classes per week to qualify.

For more, go to www.mhopus.org/melody.htm.

HANDWRITING CONTEST

Zaner-Bloser Educational Publishers announces its 14th Annual National Handwriting Contest for grades 1–8. Schools should select one winner in each grade to enter. State and national winners will be selected in each category and one student will be selected as the Grand National Champion.

National Champions in grades 1–3 win a Fisher-Price PowerTouch Learning System. National Champions in grades 4–8 win a Zire 21 Handheld PDA. Winners' schools receive gift certificates from Zaner-Bloser. The Grand National Champion receives prizes valued at more than $1,000. To be eligible, schools must use Zaner-Bloser Handwriting as their handwriting program.

For more information, including how to enter, visit www.zaner-bloser.com/html/HWcontest.html. Entries must be postmarked by **March 1, 2005.**

On The Web

BROWN V. BOARD EXHIBITION

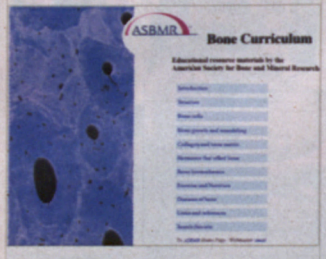
"With an Even Hand: *Brown v. Board* at Fifty" is an online exhibition that examines precedent-setting court cases that laid the groundwork for the *Brown v. Board* decision, explores the Supreme Court argument and the public's response to it, and closes with an overview of this profound decision's aftermath. The exhibition features more than 100 items from the Library of Congress' extensive holdings on this subject, including books, documents, photographs, personal papers, manuscripts, maps, music, films, political cartoons, and prints. Go to www.loc.gov/exhibits/brown/.

LOOKING FOR NEW FUND-RAISERS?

This breeze-through site offers a short list of interesting school fund-raising ideas and some new twists on old standards. The next time your school club needs money, why not sell something useful like first-aid kits, host a faculty contest, or convince people to buy goat insurance? (Just see the site). Go to www.reacheverychild.com/feature/fundraisers.html.

FEEL IT IN YOUR BONES

A project of the Education Committee of the American Society for Bone and Mineral Research (ASBMR), this site delivers no-nonsense, illustrated information on the body's support structure, focusing on areas such as bone structure, bone cells, growth and remodeling, collagen and bone matrix, hormones that effect bone, bone biomechanics, diseases of the bone, and exercise and nutrition. Students in high school to medical school can use this site as a handy biology reference. Go to http://depts.Washington.edu/bonebio/ASBMRed/ASBMRed.html.



AN OCEAN OF INFO

Interested in whales, oil spills, and the health and fate of our oceans? Then check out *Oceanus* magazine online. The site contains articles and commentary on the meaning and value of ocean research, engineering, and education at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, in addition to features on ocean life, climate change, and exploration. Go to http://oceanusmag.whoi.edu/index.html.

REVILED AND REVERED

From the Smithsonian Office of Education, this site for grades 3–8 uses five lessons to help students examine misconceptions about herps (the collective name given to reptiles and amphibians), discover how humans have viewed herps throughout history, and catalog the differences and similarities between reptiles and amphibians. Links to other resources are also included. Go to www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/herps/start.html.

BRUSHING UP ON U.S. IMMIGRATION

This Library of Congress site offers multiple online exhibits examining immigration to the United States in the last few hundred years. Jewish life in America for the last 350 years, mid to late 19th-century Chinese immigration, images of Ellis Island, a look at New York's Lower East Side Tenement museum, and interviews with today's immigrants are all featured, as well as interactive timelines and maps showing immigration patterns. Go to http://memory.loc.gov/learn/community/cc_immigration.php.

DIVERSITY CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 1–28—BLACK HISTORY MONTH
A time to reflect on the achievements, history, and contributions of African Americans. Created by Carter G. Woodson in the 1920s as Negro History Week, the celebration became month-long in 1976.

FEBRUARY 12—ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY
This 16th U.S. President was born in 1809 and assassinated in 1865. His birthday is observed as a federal holiday—President's Day—along with George Washington's on February 21.

FEBRUARY 15—SUSAN B. ANTHONY'S BIRTHDAY
Born in 1820, Anthony crusaded for women's rights and the abolition of slavery until her death in 1906.

FEBRUARY 20—FREDERICK DOUGLASS DAY
Although Douglass' birthdate in unknown, this African-American journalist and anti-slavery leader died on this day in 1895.

MARCH

MARCH 1–31—NATIONAL MENTAL RETARDATION AWARENESS MONTH
A month set aside to promote awareness of mental retardation and the welfare of the 7.2 million Americans with this disability. For more, see www.thearc.org.

MARCH 1–31—MUSIC IN OUR SCHOOLS MONTH
Sponsored by the National Association for Music Education, this month emphasizes the importance of music in the learning experience. For more, see www.menc.org.

MARCH 1—KOREAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT DAY
The Korean Proclamation of Independence is read on this day, which commemorates the anniversary of the independence movement against colonial Japanese rule in 1919.

MARCH 8—INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
The anniversary of the 1857 strike by women textile workers in New York to protest low wages and inhumane working conditions. In the early 1900s, this day was named to honor working women.

TEACHING ABOUT TAXES

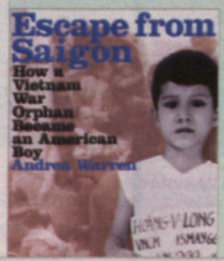
Why do we pay taxes? If your high school or community college students (or you for that matter) have ever asked this question, then look to the IRS Understanding Taxes site. Detailed lesson plans, interactive activities, simulations, examples of how and why taxes affect and influence our daily lives, and more explain the hows of taxes (a primer on tax application) and the whys of taxes (the theory and history behind taxes). Lesson plans are correlated to national and state educational standards. Go to www.irs.gov/app/understandingTaxes/jsp/teacher_home.jsp.

BOOKS BY NEA MEMBERS

ESCAPE FROM SAIGON: HOW A VIETNAM WAR ORPHAN BECAME AN AMERICAN BOY

By Andrea Warren

With a bleak-looking future in his own country, eight-year-old Long, an Amerasian orphan whose father was an American, escaped Vietnam at the end of the war. Through Operation Babylift, which airlifted children out of Saigon, Long was brought to the United States and became part of an American family. Long's struggles in leaving his home and becoming part of a different culture are depicted in this tense and moving real-life story. 128 pp. $17 from Melanie Kroupa Books. To order, go to www.fsgkidsbooks.com or call 888-330-8477.



THE PERFECT STAGE CREW: THE COMPLEAT TECHNICAL GUIDE FOR HIGH SCHOOL, COLLEGE, AND COMMUNITY THEATER

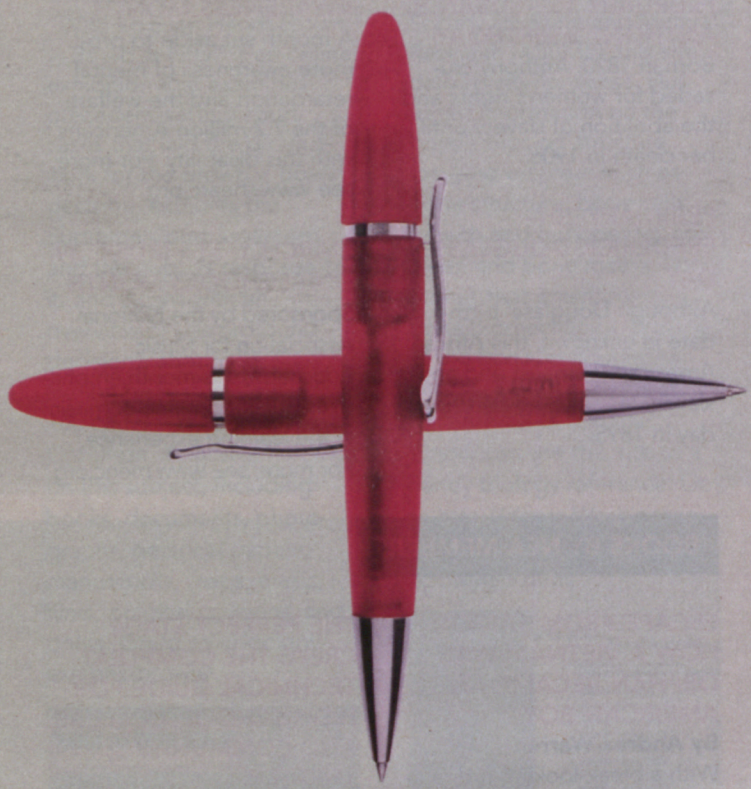
By John Kaluta

A technical theater veteran shows it is possible to pull off a fantastic production on a limited budget in less than 40 days in this volume covering the nuts and bolts of putting a show together. The book tackles the most common and complex stage and crew problems, from hanging lights and repairing sound equipment to painting scenery to preparing tickets and generating publicity, and will help you turn backstage workers into the perfect crew. 256 pp. $19.95 from Allworth Press. To order, visit www.allworth.com.

KEYSTONE STABLES: THE TROUBLE WITH SKYE

By Marsha Hubler

Angry, 13-year-old, foster kid Skye Nicholson has been in so much trouble that she faces juvenile detention. Luckily, though, Tom and Eileen Chambers decide to give her one last chance and take her into their home. Through her stay on this horse ranch, Skye is introduced to religion, and through her newfound hope, she is given a chance to turn her life around. Part of the Keystone Stables series, written by a foster parent, this book would be appropriate for parents looking for faith-based ways to guide their adolescent kids. 130 pp. $2.99 from Zonderkidz. To order, go to www.zonderkidz.com.



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Take Note

Addressing Legal Issues Around Students' Sexual Orientation

A consortium of national organizations—including NEA—under the leadership of the National School Boards Association (NSBA), has issued a resource document to help school leaders address legal issues surrounding students' sexual orientation and gender identity.

"Dealing with Legal Matters Surrounding Students' Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity" provides practical guidance on schools' legal rights and responsibilities with respect to students, school programs, and curriculum. Using a Q&A format, the publication addresses questions on student organizations and clubs; dress codes; curriculum and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students; student involvement in school events; and student harassment. Among the questions answered: What are your legal responsibilities as a school leader when it comes to student-sponsored clubs such as a Gay-Straight Alliance? What should you do if you learn students are being harassed because of their sexual orientation? Download the publication for free at www.nea.org/teachers/nearesources-teachers.html.

Call for Papers

Do you teach, or have you taught, low-income children? Have a story to share? Catherine Wiley, an English professor at the University of Colorado at Denver is seeking creative nonfiction essays, 10–30 pages, on teaching low-income children in public schools. Teaching is defined as classroom instruction, counseling, on-site administration, nursing, cafeteria work, coaching, etc. "No Child Left Behind" may be a theme or you may compare teaching before and after the implementation of NCLB. Comparisons of different kinds of schools, e.g., urban vs. rural or suburban schools, may be appropriate. The book is intended for a general audience, so an academic framework is not acceptable. Send queries to catherine.wiley@cudenver.edu. Four-page proposals or completed essays must be received by May 1, 2005.

Teaching Religions From the News

The Thirteen/WNET-produced newsmagazine program *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* offers an online video workshop for high school and college educators that highlights the special resources that the news can offer for teaching about world religions. Based on a Colgate University course, the video represents an example of how to teach about world religions using the news—particularly the role that TV, radio, newspapers, and other media can play in the classroom. The Web site course features classroom footage shot on location in 2003–04 and augmented by the course description, syllabus, and exam questions. To check out the course, go to www.religionethics.com/teach/. Additional resources for K–12 teachers, including lesson plans, teaching tips, and a downloadable viewer's guide, are also available on the *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* Web site: www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/teach/.

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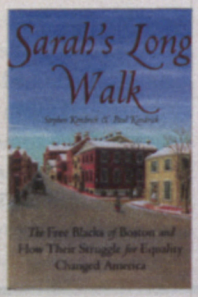
In Print

EQUALITY IN SCHOOLS

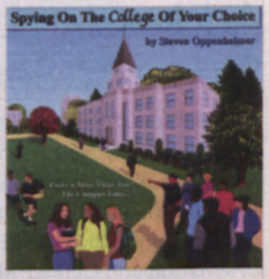


The struggle to desegregate America's schools began 100 years before *Brown v. Board of Education* when a 5-year-old girl named Sarah was forced to walk past five white schools to reach her poor and overcrowded all-Black school. In ***Sarah's Long Walk: The Free Blacks of Boston and How Their Struggle for Equality Changed America***, Sarah's father, fed up with his daughter's unfair treatment, sues the city of Boston on his daughter's behalf. Father and son authors Stephen and Paul Kendrick recreate this landmark event in the struggle for equality in schools. 320 pp. $26 from Beacon Press. To order, visit www.beacon.org.

STANDING SHORT

Michael Jordan isn't a basketball player—at least not this Michael Jordan. This Michael is the shortest kid in seventh grade. So when a pretty blond eighth grader named Macy starts to pay a lot of attention to him, Michael is amazed. Could this girl really like him? ***The (Short) Story of My Life*** by Jennifer B. Jones humorously captures a boy's anxiety about middle school and girls. 160 pp. $16.95 from Walker & Company. To order, visit www.walkeryoungreaders.com.

MAKE THE MOST OF THAT CAMPUS VISIT



With all the colleges out there, how can students be expected to choose which one will best fit them? A good source of information for students and their families, ***Spying on the College of Your Choice*** by Steven Oppenheimer acts as a guide through the challenging process of choosing a college. It includes suggestions on making the most of your college visit, and brings up issues about college life that most college guides steer clear of, such as tolerance and drug use. Additionally, hundreds of ideas are given for useful questions to ask about colleges. 254 pp. $15.95 from Virtual Book Worm. For ordering information, go to www.spyingonthecollegeofyourchoice.com.

TRUE DEVOTION

Hachiko the dog waits every day at the train station for his owner, the Professor, to return. Then one day, the Professor does not return on the train. So Hachiko continues to wait for him…for 10 years! Inspired by a true story, Leslèa Newman's ***Hachiko Waits*** tells a legendary and heartfelt Japanese story about loyalty and devotion. 96 pp. $15.95 from Henry Holt and Company. To order, visit www.henryholtchildrensbooks.com or call 888-330-8477.

Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits

Helping NEA Members and Their Families "Make it Home."

Spring is home buying season, and now is the perfect time to think about your homeownership goals. **The NEA Home Financing Program®** offers a variety of home financing programs that make it easier for you to purchase a home or make the most of your current one. Whether you are a first-time home buyer (adult children of members are also eligible) or looking to move to a larger home, refinance, or leverage your home equity to pay for home improvements, we have a variety of flexible financing options to suit your needs.

Call **1-800-NEA-4-YOU** (800-632-4968) for more information about the home buying process or to get today's rates. Be sure to ask about the complimentary NEA Getaway℠ hotel package you'll receive after closing on a new mortgage or refinance!

The NEA Members Insurance Trust® works hard to provide cost-effective and feature-rich life insurance plans to help protect NEA members and their families. Due to positive claims experience with the NEA Insurance plans, a new **NEA Group Term Life Plan,** issued by the Prudential Insurance Company of America, was introduced this past November and offers rates 10 percent lower overall than the previous NEA Term Life Plan. In addition, full benefits now extend to age 70, five years longer than with the old plan. More good news—members' spouses may apply for the same or greater coverage at even more competitive rates!

For information, call the NEA Member Benefits Member Service Center toll free at 800-637-4636, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (or Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ET.

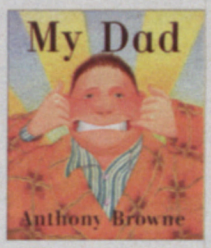
THE NEA HOME FINANCING PROGRAM HAS PROVIDED OVER $2 BILLION IN HOME LOANS TO NEA MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

ILLUSTRATION: CORBIS

GRANT WRITING TIPS

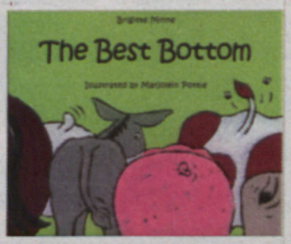
Using Beverly A. Brownings' ***Grant Writing for Educators: Practical Strategies for Teachers, Administrators, and Staff,*** you will be able to improve your grant writing skills and increase the odds of receiving those much-needed grants. This guide provides strategies for finding funders, dealing with paperwork, writing winning proposals according to instructions, and more. 120 pp. $9.95 from National Education Service. To order, visit www.nesonline.com or call 800-733-6786.

A PICTURE OF DAD



Anthony Browne's book, ***My Dad,*** uses colorful illustrations filled with imagination and exaggeration as a child describes the accomplishments of his father. Clad in his comfy bathrobe, the boy's dad can—literally—eat like a horse and wrestle with giants in this tribute to fathers everywhere. 32 pp. $5.95 for the mini version or $16 for the full-sized from Farrar, Straus and Giroux Books for Young Readers. To order, call 888-330-8477.

A HAPPY END

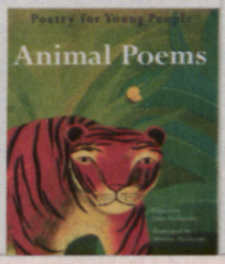


All of the animals at the farm gather together to decide who has ***The Best Bottom***. Author Brigitte Minne's simple and amusing contest of tails features all the farm animals admiring the splendor of their own tails. With some resourceful thinking, however, an unlikely animal emerges as the winner, showing that creativity counts even when it comes to tails. For ages 4–8. 32 pp. $15.95 from Milk and Cookies Press. To order, visit www.ibooks.net.

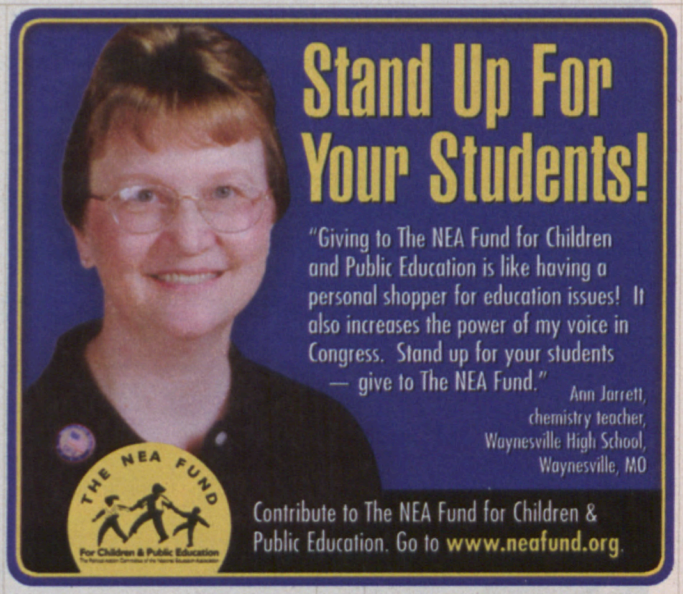
FLYING THROUGH HISTORY

Martin W. Sandler tells the story of American aviation in ***Flying over the USA: Airplanes in American Life.*** Sandler describes the exciting stories of the American pioneers in flight, and traces the path from hot air balloon flight to supersonic jet fighters in this latest book in the Transportation in America series. 64 pp. $21.95 from Oxford University Press. To order, visit www.oup.com or call 800-451-7556.

POETRY FOR ANIMAL LOVERS



John Hollander edited this collection of ***Animal Poems***. Discover which creatures inspired such literary heavyweights as Dickinson, Tennyson, and Wordsworth into writing. Vivid illustrations accompany the lively verse, and kids are sure to love the animal focus. 48 pp. $14.95 from Sterling. To order, visit www.craft-books.com.


Stand Up For Your Students!
"Giving to The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education is like having a personal shopper for education issues! It also increases the power of my voice in Congress. Stand up for your students — give to The NEA Fund."
Ann Jarrett, chemistry teacher, Waynesville High School, Waynesville, MO
THE NEA FUND
For Children & Public Education
Contribute to The NEA Fund for Children & Public Education. Go to www.neafund.org.

What's Up at HIN

NEA HIN

INDOOR AIR QUALITY TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS PROMOTIONAL PRODUCT AVAILABLE!

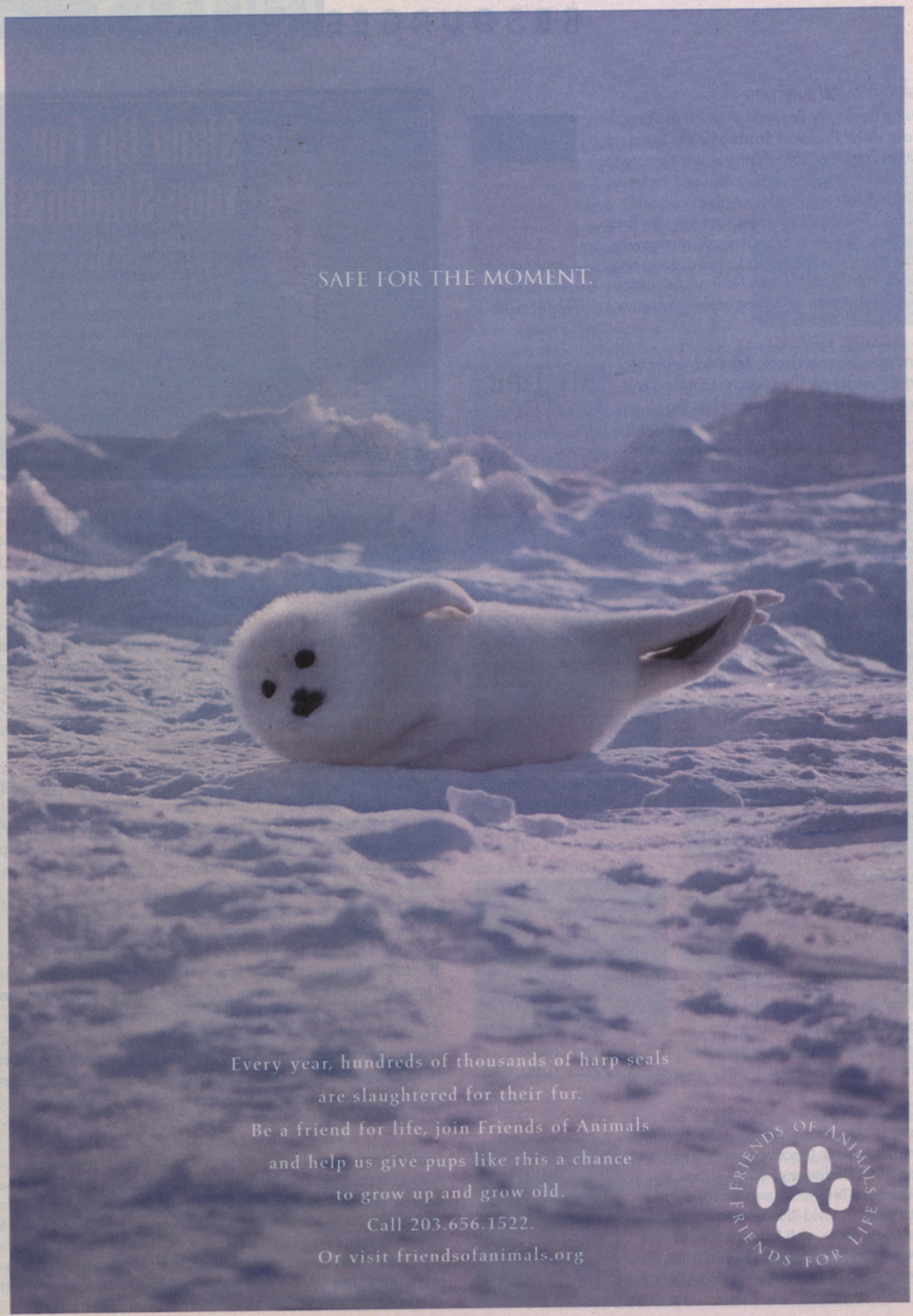
Are you having trouble convincing your principal or superintendent to improve the indoor air quality (IAQ) in your school or school district? If so, EPA has created "The IAQ Tools for Schools Advantage," a 4-minute VHS video/CD-ROM package that aims to assist school staff in promoting EPA's IAQ Tools for Schools program to key decision makers in the school community. The video or CD can be used to help make the case for implementing the program, which guides schools on how to identify, prevent, and solve IAQ problems using low and no-cost solutions. It features media stories on school IAQ problems and testimonials from school officials on the importance of dealing proactively with this growing issue. To obtain a copy to assist you with your efforts or to learn more about IAQ Tools for Schools, contact Jennie Young at jyoung@nea.org or 202-822-7481.

WORDS CAN WORK: WHEN TALKING WITH KIDS ABOUT SEXUAL HEALTH BOOK

Words Can Work tells how 12 families talk about sexual health. Teens, in first-person accounts, take readers into their world, while Dr. David Satcher, former U.S. Surgeon General, and Dr. Paula Rauch, Massachusetts General Hospital, offer strategies—and the words—parents can use to talk with their kids about puberty, values, relationships, sex, birth control, and more. Visit www.wordscanwork.com to learn more or to obtain a copy.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEART THIS VALENTINE'S DAY

Cardiovascular diseases are the number one killer of men and women in the United States. While the myth persists that heart disease affects men more than women, in reality these diseases are responsible for one female death each minute, claiming nearly half a million women's lives each year. Lower the risks for yourself and your loved ones: start adopting a healthier lifestyle today. Visit www.neahin.org for new information and links to help you take care of your heart this Valentine's Day.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Every year, hundreds of thousands of harp seals
are slaughtered for their fur.
Be a friend for life, join Friends of Animals
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On TV

BETWEEN THE LIONS

PBS Kids, check local listings for times and days.
Between the Lions wins Emmys because it helps develop younger viewers' reading skills with a variety of approaches, from phonemic awareness to text comprehension. The first of its kind to teach reading that is research-based, this program is far from dull and plodding. Created for children ages 4–7, the show begins at a magical library run by lion puppets, parents Theo and Cleo and children Lionel and Leona. The family's adventures provide the narrative thread for each half-hour program, which is supplemented by a number of clever and visually appealing stand-alone segments. Recent research conducted by two universities indicates that younger children benefit from watching the program. An extensive Web site is available at pbs.org/lions/.

HOLOCAUST HEROES

Discovery Channel, February 7, 9 a.m., ET, check local listings.
This special explores the roots of the Holocaust, the last days of Anne Frank, and the personal stories of a group of Holocaust survivors. Can be taped and used in the classroom for one year.

CHOOSE OR LOSE: VOTE OR DIE

MTV, February 7 and 21, 4 a.m., ET.
P. Diddy hits the streets and the presidential conventions to talk to the powerful and powerless about why young minorities are so disinterested in politics and disconnected from the political process. The half-hour show can be taped and used in the classroom for one year.

BIOGRAPHY CLOSE-UP: CIVIL RIGHTS HEROES

A&E, February 8, 7 a.m., ET.
This hourlong program profiles some of the people who have kept the ideals of the civil rights movement alive in the United States, including Mae Bertha Carter, Bill Russell, and John Lewis. Can be taped and used in the classroom for two years with teaching materials available at www.aetv.com/classroom.

A FRAGILE FREEDOM: AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORIC SITES

History Channel, February 10, 6 a.m., ET.
Explore eight unique African-American historic sites around the country while learning of the strength of Black communities during the 1800s. The hourlong show can be taped and used in the classroom for two years with eaching materials at www.historychannel.com/classroom.

THE LAST DAYS OF WORLD WAR II

The History Channel, premiers February 18–24, 8 p.m., ET/PT, check local listings.
Sixty years ago this February, American forces began their assault on Iwo Jima, Japan's heavily fortified island. Taking this moment as its starting point, the History Channel developed a documentary series detailing how the war was won. The island was riddled with underground tunnels and Japanese gunners would pop up out of the mountain, fire at the Marines below, and then drop back into hiding. The Marines had never dealt with this kind of fortification before, and it took days to come up with a strategy to overtake the underground enemy. Survivors and historians recount the siege, supplemented by archival film and photos. Good graphics combined with interviews make this series interesting for teens and for the rest of us. However, some pictures of dead soldiers from archival photos may upset younger students.

SPORTSFIGURES

ESPN2, February 28, 4:30 a.m., ET, check local listings.
Professional athletes use sports to demonstrate math and physics in this series. In this episode, "Gravity Check/Batting the Unknown," Dave Mirra explains gravity's role in bike stunts and Troy Glaus uses algebraic variables to determine batting averages. The show can be taped and used in the classroom for one year with teaching materials at www.sportsfigures.espn.com.

On TV listings are provided by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., www.kidsnet.org, and by Cable in the Classroom's Access Learning *magazine at www.ciconline.org.*

NFL Players Tiki and Ronde Barber Lead the Way!

National Football League stars and twin brothers Tiki and Ronde Barber are dedicated literacy advocates. That's why they're leading NEA's Read Across America celebration as honorary Co-chairs and recruiting other celebrities and star athletes along the way. Tiki, with the New York Giants, and Ronde, with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers are also Verizon Literacy Champions. They'll be donning the familiar Cat in the Hat hat and leading the nation in reading March 2 as we celebrate the joy of reading and Read Across America Day. How are you celebrating reading March 2? Go to www.nea.org/readacross. Pledge your activities and get a resource kit chock full of posters and ideas.

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PHOTO BETWEEN THE LIONS: CORBIS/JOHN E. BARRETT/© WGBH/SIRIUS THINKING; HOLOCAUST HEROES: DISCOVERY COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

Sing Out!

It's not on the test, but music has helped children come together, cope with tragedy, and learn.

BY ANNA ANTONUCCI

IN THE CORNER OF MY STUDY sits a plain rectangular box. Within rests an old autoharp, a small wooden instrument that plays chords when keys are pressed and strings are strummed.

My autoharp evokes vivid memories of teaching primary school children in California in the '50s, '60s, and '70s. In those days, before theorists and tests took over the school curriculum, teachers were trusted to plan what young children needed to know and to teach each child at his own level as much as could be absorbed. We were free to fit the lessons to the needs of the day.

Each elementary teacher, as part of California's certification process, had to be proficient in playing the autoharp and teaching music. When children needed a rest, we often stopped and injected some singing into the day's plan. What joy! When days grew long and stressful, how refreshing it was to bring out the autoharp and sit in a circle and blend our voices in shared songs. A child who needed to move about was often called up to strum the autoharp, and became, for a few moments, a star.

We sang "Down in the Valley," "White Coral Bells," "I Know an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly," and many, many others.

PHOTO: BRIAN DAVIES

"How heartwarming it would be today, in our classrooms, if we could put back some of the joy of spontaneous music, physical education, and playful games."

Each morning started with a patriotic song—"America," "The Star-Spangled Banner," or "America the Beautiful."

Even kindergartners were delighted to sing the morning patriotic song. I wonder sometimes now, do they remember those songs and what they mean? Did the words imprint in the psyche, as they did in mine, and come to mind at stressed times all these years later?

Through singing, we felt a communion of spirit and a joy in the beauty of life, friends, and tasks well done. There is something about being in a group close together, raising voices in harmony, that gives one such a feeling of community and completeness.

One beautiful autumn morning at school, we heard bells continuously ringing. Thinking it might be a fire drill, we exited the room, and marched to the area designated for fire drills. But when we arrived, the principal announced that our beloved President had been shot.

Stunned, we went back to our classroom, gathered in our singing circle and softly sang songs of comfort: "Where Have all the Flowers Gone," "Be Nobody's Darling but Mine," and "Some Sunday Morning."

How heartwarming it would be today, in our classrooms, if we could put back some of the joy of spontaneous music, physical education, and playful games. Maybe then children would not be so stressed out as to have to commit hate crimes or bring weapons to school. Music is a great replacement for bad language and bullying behavior.

I think back sometimes to those days of double session schools, classes in barracks buildings, overcrowded classrooms without special services and aides and wonder how we survived. Survive we did!

We were ever mindful that music, art, recess, and physical education are important. Love and hope are the backbone of all learning. Children are not cogs in machines. We do not educate them that they might fit into some gigantic money-making bureaucracy. We educate them to be persons with a sense of hope and community. We educate them to be integrated persons who can love life, even when it is tough.

And so, when I look at my old autoharp, I remember all these things and I am glad that I had the opportunity to bring music and joy to the lives of some children.

ANNA ANTONUCCI retired in 1990 after teaching for 36 years in California and Oregon. This piece was earlier published in *The News-Review* of Roseburg, Oregon.

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Allyson "Sunny" Story is known for "alphabet tag" and the other creative ways she keeps children engaged in learning.
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Announcing

THE NEW NEA REWARDS AMERICAN EXPRESS® CARD

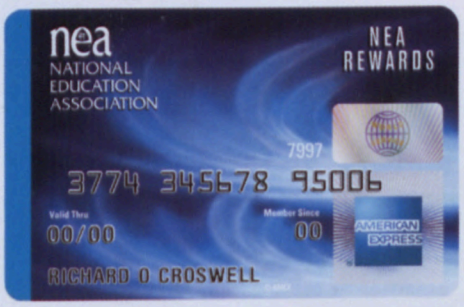
The no annual fee Rewards Card exclusively for NEA Members and their families[Δ]

Now more than ever, NEA membership has its rewards. The first ever NEA Rewards American Express Card, brought to you by NEA Member Benefits, offers the features and buying power of a Rewards Card, but with no annual fee, a choice of rewards, and the option to pay over time.[†]

With the NEA Rewards Card you are enrolled in the *WorldPoints*[SM] program where you can easily earn points for your choice of travel, cash, and merchandise rewards – you get one point for every purchase dollar you spend[♦], plus double points for travel and dining until January 2006.[♦♦]

The many valuable features of the NEA Rewards Card include a 0% Introductory Annual Percentage Rate (APR) on balance transfers and cash advance checks[†], complimentary Emergency Roadside Assistance[*], plus Identity Theft Protection[*] and great shopping benefits too.

Call today to apply and get 2,500 bonus points after your first use of your new Card – **1-888-758-7946** and mention priority code **K1A1**. (TTY users call 1-800-833-6262.)



nea Member Benefits
www.neamb.com

AMERICAN EXPRESS

[†]The Annual Percentage Rate (APR) for purchases and Bank and ATM cash advance transactions for the NEA Rewards American Express Card is currently 9.99%. The current introductory APR offer for cash advance check and balance transfer transactions is 0% through your first six statement closing dates, effective upon the opening of your account. If your minimum monthly payment is late, or when the introductory APR expires, the non-introductory APR for your account is calculated using the Variable-Rate Information accompanying your Card. If your payment is late, the Indexed Rate is applied to new and outstanding cash advance check and balance transfer balances as of the first day of the billing cycle in which the payment was late or not received. The current Indexed Rate for cash advance check and balance transfer transactions is 9.99%. Transaction fee for Bank and ATM cash advances; credit card cash advance checks and balance transfers is 2% of each cash advance ($2 minimum, $30 maximum). Transaction fee for the purchase of wire transfers, person-to-person money transfers, bets, lottery tickets, and casino gaming chips is 2% of each such purchase ($2 minimum, $30 maximum). Transaction fees are waived on balance transfers requested with your application. MBNA allocates your payments to balances (including new transactions) with lower APRs before balances with higher APRs. Balance transfers and/or cash advances of any kind may not be used to pay off or pay down any other MBNA account. If your available credit cannot accommodate any transaction, fee and/or finance charge, the account will be subject to over-the-credit-limit costs. REMINDER: To obtain the benefits of the grace period for new purchases, you must pay your New Balance Total in full and on time. The 0% APR does not apply to purchases, or to Bank or ATM cash advances.

American Express (1) converts charges made in foreign currencies to U.S. dollars using a rate selected on the business day prior to the day on which the charges are processed by American Express and (2) applies a 1% commission to the converted amount.

[Δ]This credit card program has been developed for NEA members and their families only. NEA family members eligible for Cardmembership include parents, spouse or domestic partner, and children. If a member decides not to renew membership, that person and his/her family will no longer be eligible to receive the preferred rates, fees and special promotions offered through the credit card program. If eligible, a replacement card will be offered. Any account opened in response to this offer will be governed by the laws of Delaware.

[♦]*WORLDPOINTS* REWARDS. Rewards begin at 2,500 points for cash/merchandise and 25,000 points for air. Air rewards subject to maximum dollar value and special air arrangements require payment of additional points and a processing fee. Earn 1 point per dollar of new net retail purchases charged to the Card each month. Point earnings are rounded to the nearest whole point. Cash advances, balance transfers, purchases of money orders or other cash equivalents, out-of-network payments made through Bill Pay Choice[SM], purchases made by or for a business or for a business purpose, and unauthorized/fraudulent transactions do not earn points. Earn unlimited points. Points valid for 5 years. Air rewards from AK, HI, or PR limited to mainland U.S. unless fare paid to U.S. gateway. Points and/or rewards may not be combined with other discount or reward programs, unless specifically authorized by MBNA. Online merchandise catalog has widest selection of rewards; abridged catalog sent upon request. Cash reward check expires 90 days after date of issue. Cash rewards not transferable. Other significant terms apply. Program subject to change. View program details at mbnarewards.com. Details also accompany new account materials.

[♦♦]Two points per dollar offer applies to net retail purchase transactions (qualifying purchases less credits, returns, and adjustments) made with the Card through January 1, 2006, at any eligible retail merchant categories as designated by MBNA. Retail merchants have no connection with, or direct participation in this offer. Complete details, including eligible merchant category codes will accompany new account materials. In addition to basic Points earnings, 2,500 Bonus Points will be credited to your account within 90 days of making your first retail purchase. Limit one bonus offer per new account; offer not transferable.

[*]Limitations and exclusions apply to Card benefits. Benefits apply to Cardmembers and in some cases certain family members as outlined in Guide to Coverage. Details accompany new account materials. Emergency Roadside Assistance provided by AXA Assistance USA, Chicago, IL. Emergency Roadside Assistance available to you when you have made at least one (1) purchase with your Card in the prior 12 months. The Identity Theft Recovery Unit is provided by Intersections, Inc.

The NEA is not involved in the credit decision process; standard credit procedure is followed. All applications will be subject to a confidential standard review by MBNA America.

Absolutely NO membership dues are used to market this program.

MBNA America Bank, N.A. is the issuer and administrator of this credit card program. The *WorldPoints* program is managed in part by Carlson Companies, Inc., and its affiliates, including Carlson Travel Group, a travel agency registered to do business in California (Reg. No. 2036509-50), and other states, as required. The information about the costs of the cards described in this application was accurate as of 1/2005. The information may have changed. To find out what may have changed, please call (888) 758-7946. TTY users please call (800) 833-6262.

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